

Sagas
of the
Mounted
Police

MOWERY

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Sagas of the Mounted Police

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WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

THE SILVER HAWK

HEART OF THE NORTH

SINGER OF THE WILDERNESS

FORBIDDEN VALLEY

CHALLENGE OF THE NORTH

THE VALLEY BEYOND

LONG ARM OF THE MOUNTED



"The four Sioux, diagonaling across, were drawing swiftly within rifle range."

THE CONSTABLE OF LONE SIOUX

Sagas of the Mounted Police

WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

ILLUSTRATED BY CARL KIDWELL

BOUREGY & CURL, INC.
NEW YORK

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY IN THE DOMINION OF CANADA
BY THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE COLONIAL PRESS INC., CLINTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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Foreword

Three quarters of a century ago a little band of select men, their tunics a scarlet red, their motto "*Maintiens le Droit*" (Uphold the Right), rode out of old Fort Dufferin in frontier Manitoba and headed west across the great Canadian Plains.

They were charged with establishing law and order over a huge country that had utterly no law and even less order. Blackfeet, Crees, Chippewas, Sioux, Piegans, and lesser tribes were waging incessant war with one another. The white population consisted of a handful of fur traders, frontier badmen, and a few vicious whisky-peddlers, with their rotgut and blaze-belly. The half-breed or *metis* people, living in isolated outposts along the fur-trade routes, were nursing a sullen hostility which was to flare up a decade later in the bloody Riel Rebellion.

Nature itself was a formidable enemy, with fifty-below-zero blizzards, parching summer sun, alkali dust, prairie fires, floods, and winter snow.

The great expanse between Manitoba and the Rocky Mountains was so wild and trackless that our little company of red-coated horsemen had to send most of their supplies and equipment around through the States by rail to Montana and thence up across the Border by freight wagon. Establishing small posts here and there

as they went, this band of Northwest Mounted Police were two whole years reaching the Rocky foothills.

On their three hundred rifles hung the peace and security of the entire Canadian West. But they set to work valiantly. They made treaty with the Indian tribes and gradually stopped the internecine warfare. They cleaned out the badmen and whisky-traders and kept them cleaned out.

When the first hardy settlers began trickling across the Great Plains, the Mounted Police were there to guide, counsel, and shepherd them. When the Half-Breed Rebellion broke out, the Mounted Policemen fought alongside the militia till the rebellion was quelled. When finally the railroads began reaching out across the Plains to the Rockies and the Pacific Ocean, the Northwest Mounted were their protectors against the sabotage of the 'breed freight-haulers and the hostility of the Indians.

As if ruling over this huge region was not enough, they soon began pushing their little outposts farther and farther north, into the Northwest Territories. Step by step they moved north—down the great Three Rivers to the Arctic Ocean, then along the Arctic Coast and out into the Arctic Ocean itself, till at last they were flung from the Klondike and Herschel Island clear across to Ellesmere and bleak Labrador.

In the slow course of years it was finally adjudged that they had earned the right to affix "Royal" in front of their name, so they became the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Still later they underwent amalgamation with the federal police at Ottawa and became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Today they are a body of forty-five hundred men, with a fleet of motorcars, an air arm, a radio network and the other appurtenances of a modern police force. With the passing of the frontier, the nature of their work changed. Except for a few isolated posts in the far North, they are much the same now as any excellent police body or state constabulary.

I mean no detraction whatever of the present fine Force when I say that the true glory of Canada's Mounted Police rests in the epic record of those frontier times. Those early men bought this glory fairly, with hardship and often death, with loneliness, with a mountainous burden of work, with the tact and courage with which they "upheld the right."

It is in those times before the amalgamation that the stories of this book of mine are set.

Much fiction, good and bad, has been written about the famous Mounted Police. Much of it has been in the nature of hero worship. I myself have never seen any point to this. They were no company of saints but ordinary men, who did what they did with the hands, brains, and hearts of mere men.

I know the history of the early Northwest Mounted as well as any man alive, and I have always been impressed by the very human qualities of the men; by their trials, their shortcomings, and the truly magnificent things they did as plain humans.

Various explanations have been given for the fact that a few hundred men could rule so large a territory and rule it so well that the crime rate there was the lowest in modern society. Certainly they did not rule

by guns or any other use of force, nor did they possess any magic wand, as you would sometimes believe from the fiction and articles about them. My own opinion is that the explanation lies in the high ethical standard which the Force set and consistently maintained. The word of a Mounted Policeman could always be depended on to the hilt, like the Quaker "yea, yea" and "nay, nay." The men were firm, just, and kindly, and led lives of almost monkish austerity. In a word, they practiced what they preached and obeyed the laws which they asked others to obey.

Let me tell you a word about these stories of mine.

THE SCOUT centers on that problem which the Police had to face perennially—of whether to deal sternly with lawless Indian elements or treat them kindly and win them by affection.

The story CORPORAL NAT is a human sidelight on Canada's greatest single undertaking—the building of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

THE LONG SHADOW touches upon one of the gold rushes of the Canadian West, of which the Klondike rush was the chief but by no means the only one.

The rather rollicking story, A LAMB AND SOME SLAUGHTERING, is based on a yarn told to me by its actual participant, at a reunion of NWMP veterans at Calgary years ago. The playwright Willard Mack, who also was there and heard this story, urged me to write it up. "But see here, Mowery," he added, "if you muff a yarn as good as that one, I will personally break your neck." I hope I did not muff it.

THE CONSTABLE OF LONE SIOUX is a graphic illustration of the take-and-give troubles that the early Police had with restless, unsettled Indian bands—in this instance, the Sioux tribes who fled up across the Border after they had massacred Custer's outfit on the Little Big Horn.

The two stories MANNIKIN TALK and A RELIC OF THE VIKINGS belong to the first two decades of the Twentieth Century, but essentially they are stories of the frontier, in this case the Arctic. Though the fact is little known, it was the Mounted Police who explored, occupied, and in some cases even discovered the Arctic Islands. If these vital defensive outposts are now in Anglo-Saxon hands, it is largely thanks to the sacrifices and hardships of the Mounted Police.

Lastly, ST. GABRIEL ZSBYSKI, going back to the early settler days, shows how the Force had to shelter and protect the various immigrant bands, new-come to the inhospitable prairie.

Most of these stories, since their original magazine appearance, have been published in various high-school and college English texts. I have a suspicion that it was the character of the Police heroes and the fascination of the Canadian Plains, Rockies, and the North, rather than any excellence in the telling, which led to their being selected as examples of the *raconteur's* art; but I thank the selectors nevertheless. I thank, also, the original editors and publishers for their permission to use the yarns here.

WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Warwick, New York
February, 1953

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The Scout

It was eleven o'clock at night, and the wavy horizon of the Barren Grounds was cutting the sun exactly in two. Half-veiled by mist from the muskeg lakes, it looked like a great golden orange immersed in a pool of silver. Presently it would sink for half an hour, to bob up a few degrees away and commence another blazing circle in the sky.

We were waiting—Inspector Norrys, Constable Wary Haskins, and myself—for Scout Wilson to return.

He had said that we would find the Tzuhl-Tinnehs across a little height of land just ahead of us, at a lake where deer and whitefish and molting geese made good summer camping.

Straight as the flight of a teal *en traverse*, Scout Wilson had brought us those four hundred miles from Fort Valour without missing his goal by so much as an hour's walk.

Shortly we saw Wilson coming back, through the willow thickets and sphagnum bog of the low ground where we waited. As he approached, all of us looked sharply at his bronzed, inscrutable face for a hint as to whether or not we had run down our quarry.

"They are there." Wilson jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "At the lake, a half mile away."

Young Haskins unslung his rifle and reached into his pack for extra cartridges; he carried the ammunition for our .303's. But at a remonstrating frown from Inspector Norrys, he let the carton slip back and re-slung his Ross.

"We'll take a look into the camp from the watershed," the inspector said coolly. "Then we'll wait there till the sun comes up again."

Keeping hidden from stray hunters, we slipped silently up the crown of the hill and crouched behind some clumps of coarse bear grass.

Below us in the purpling dusk lay a good-sized river-head lake. Along its upper shore three-dozen leather tents squatted on the caribou moss like old-fashioned beehives, with piles of caribou horns here and there, and long poles of jerky drying. The scattering of naked

children, the hyenalike yellow dogs, the old women pounding endlessly at their pemmican making, the strings of sun-blackened geese which had been speared in the lake made as wild and primitive a scene as anyone would want to look upon.

With his binoculars, Inspector Norrys searched the camp thoughtfully.

At last he said, "Half the men appear to be out hunting, to judge from the number of tents. Wilson, see if you can recognize any of the ones we're after, down yonder."

Wilson took the glasses, looked briefly at the camp, and nodded. "All six of them are there."

One by one, he pointed them out to Inspector Norrys. They were six young Tzuhl-Tinneh bucks who had broken away from the stolid customs of their tribe and had taken to fur thievery and bloodshed. In summer, when peltry stealing was unprofitable, they came back to their band and idled away a few moons. Calling themselves the "Skunk-Bears," they ranged through the northern Strong Woods and the southern Barrens in winter, robbing lonely white men and *métis*, playing carcajou to trap lines, and occasionally resorting to murder itself.

One year ago they had stolen an Eskimo's young wife at the mouth of Great Fish River, and had carried her south with them. She had escaped them somehow, out in the Arctic Barrens that fall, and had survived the winter by snaring rabbits for food and catching foxes for her clothes. When the break-up came, she headed back north toward her people. The Skunk-Bears struck her trail, followed, caught her—and she

was never seen again. Then the Skunk-Bears raided along that Eskimo coast for a month, wiping out single families and plundering without let-up, before striking back southward across the Great Tundra.

As our guide on this trip to seize the malefactors, we had employed Wilson instead of an Indian, because the Indians were afraid of the murderous six and would probably have guided us astray. But we knew we could depend on Wilson, who trapped solitarily in the Athabasca country and often penetrated the wild Barrens on trips for the fur companies.

A grim and taciturn man this Wilson was, but the best scout and most experienced woods-runner in all Mackenzie or Keewatin. I knew, vaguely, that he had once been a member of the Force, but had been discharged for some reason. He mentioned this affair to no one; and after one feel of his steel-cold nature, nobody cared or dared to ask him any personal question.

Often during our long, fast trek from Fort Valour, I had wondered why Wilson had consented to be our scout. It was not the fine pay he drew. Money meant absolutely nothing to a man of Wilson's character. Nor was it our company; he seemed to have little use for association with his fellow humans. Just why he had come was a dark mystery, though I knew there must be some hard, compelling reason.

All during the trip Wilson had kept aloof from us, never thawing or warming. His duties he performed perfectly and yet formally, with a "Yes, sir" to Norrys, a "Yes, Sergeant" to me, and a "Mr." to young Constable Haskins. Sometimes I believed that he had come along

out of a great ache to be connected with the Police just once more, even if in the lowly capacity of a scout.

Later I realized that from the start of our trip Wilson had known the temper of this primitive Tzuhl-Tinneh tribe far better than we had. From the very start his motive had been as sharp-cut as blue gun metal.

We crouched there on the ridge-top till the forty-minute night had passed. Then Inspector Norrys gave his orders.

"We'll go down to the camp together. Keep your rifles in sling and your revolvers in your belts. Under no circumstance show fight. Only be forceful and firm. I will give them a harangue and then we will arrest the men. No trouble will ensue if everything is done properly. Each of you three men will take two of the Skunk-Bears in charge. I'll watch out for escape or trickery."

Wilson spoke up, his words as incisive as the snick of steel. "I am a scout. My duty was to bring you to the Indian camp and to take you back. It was not to take charge of prisoners. Or go into that camp with you. I stay here."

Young Haskins would have sworn except that his jaw dropped too much in amazement. I myself was at first astounded at Wilson's indifference, then angry. I felt that the slightest trace of white-man fellowship, in a dangerous situation like ours, would have compelled him to go with us. Four men would have been twice as safe as three. Besides, Wilson knew those Indians well and had considerable power with them.

Only Inspector Norrys was not surprised or perturbed.

"You are quite right, Wilson," he agreed. "It is not your duty. You may stay here. We'll rejoin you shortly."

I realized why Norrys did not try to persuade Wilson to go along, when we needed that extra rifle so desperately. The inspector was positive that the Tzuhl-Tinnehs would be cowed by the Mounted detail. He had a reputation for contempt toward Indians as fighters.

I did not share his assurance. In most cases firmness does beat bullets, but there are exceptions, and I was afraid that this might be one of them.

We started down toward the lake. Wilson stayed behind, on the hilltop, as immobile as the granite boulder he was sitting on.

Our reception, as we neared the Tzuhl-Tinneh camp, should have warned us. Someone raised the Yellow-Knife yell, and it was taken up by a dozen throats. The children stopped playing, the old squaws stopped beating pemmican, the hyenalike "crackies" came tearing out at us, and the men slipped into the tepees for their weapons. The whole camp turned ugly, like a sudden shift of wind to the north.

The Skunk-Bears walked leisurely into their tepees—merely to get out of sight, it seemed. Canoes lay at hand along the landwash, but the six bush-sneaks made no effort to escape. This fact struck me as ominous, but Inspector Norrys paid no attention to it—or to any of the other plain, sinister signs.

We kicked the yellow crackies aside and strode on into camp, where the Indians had bunched up around the tepees.

"I'm going to harangue them before we make the

arrests," Norrys said to us. "Sergeant Pike, you and Haskins guard the lodges, one man to each side, to see that the Skunk-Bears don't get away."

Haskins crossed to one side of the camp and I to the other. Inspector Norrys stepped up on a rock. He was tall and commanding in person, his voice was firm and clear, and his short harangue was admirable in all ways—except for the results it got.

Briefly he told how the Skunk-Bears had been stealing peltry, robbing lonely cabins, and committing other acts which the Law forbade. Since the Force had had no previous dealing with the Tzuhl-Tinnehs, he carefully explained what was meant by *Maintiens le Droit*. That the Law protected all men equally; protected a man's tepee and his trap line, his *squaw-siche* and his life. That individuals who stole and killed forfeited their right to be free and must be taken away to punishment—

He was interrupted by an angry, snarling murmur from the leathery-faced Tinnehs. But somehow he silenced the murmur and finished his harangue, and then began naming off the Skunk-Bears, one by one.

His last words were completely lost in a chorus of defiant hooting from the Indians, men and squaws alike. One of their hunters, a subchief of sorts, leaped upon a canoe, and waved a caribou spear for silence.

The Skunk-Bears, he said, had done nothing wrong. The Eskimo *squaw-siche* had been captured by them and so belonged to them, by the Tinneh custom. When she ran off and they caught her again, she deserved to be clubbed like a dog and killed. And what if the Skunk-Bears had reddened the ground with the blood

of a few Kunquagmiut in the Great Fish country? Eskimos were not men, like Tinnehs, but only "half-men," who lived like bears in snowbanks and ate raw fish—

The man's talk was ludicrous to white ears, but it was good Indian reasoning. From my station over by the tepees, I could see the hunters fairly itching to start trouble. Some of them were fingering spears; others were holding old trade muskets in their hands and rifle balls between their teeth. The women were as ready as the men to pitch into us, with knives and stones.

One squaw grabbed at my rifle; another almost tore my pack from me. I started pushing through the mob toward Norrys. Still calm and unperturbed, except that his voice was a little raised, he kept demanding that the tribe turn the Skunk-Bears over to us, or we would arrest them forcibly.

I reached his side and looked for Haskins, knowing now that we three would have to keep together if we were to escape alive. Haskins was not in sight. A second later I heard a shot inside one of the smaller tepees. Then the leather tent seemed to rise up bodily and dance about like a bear, before it finally toppled over. A surge of the mob in that direction hid everything from us, but we heard Haskins' voice— He was crying for help.

"Inspector!" I shouted. "That wasn't *his* rifle. He's been shot, wounded. We've got to get to him!"

Even then Norrys did not realize the mortal danger we were in, or see that his "firmness without violence" was an utter failure with that particular band of Tinnehs. I had to pull him off the rock.

We hammered our way toward Haskins. He was down under a seething pack that were tearing and slashing at him like so many wolves. The dead body of one of the Skunk-Bears lay tangled in the skins of the toppled lodge. Only later did we learn that Haskins had taken the inspector's words about "forcible arrest" at their literal value; he had gone into the tepee, and the Skunk-Bear had shot him. Though desperately wounded, the youngster had grappled with the Indian and had succeeded in braining him with the butt of his revolver.

When we had finally kicked and jostled the Tinnehs off and prodded them back with rifle muzzles, Wary lay quite still. He was mauled and beaten and half-stripped. I dropped down and examined him, and saw blood spouting from the wound where a musket ball had entered his neck.

Above me, I could hear Norrys demanding that they turn over the men we were after. He sounded to me like a schoolteacher admonishing some rowdy school-boys. And all that time a dozen guns were pointed at us, and young Haskins was bleeding to death before our eyes!

The pitiful sight of Haskins—his bleeding, his torn clothes and tousled hair—was maddening to me. A more straight-shooting, daredevilish youngster never graduated from the Awkward Squad at Regina, or lied a year about his age to get into the Service.

A rage swept through me at Norrys. All this had come about because of his cocksureness. We three had had no business separating. We should never have wasted time with that haranguing. We should have

taken advantage of those first few seconds of confusion, seized our men, and got away.

I forgot that the inspector was a superior, and lost control of myself completely. "You fool!" I cried at him. "Can't you see they're going to mob us? Can't you see that Haskins is dying? We've got to get him away! Got to get out of here ourselves—quick! For heaven's sake, stop that preaching about law and order!"

I don't know whether Norrys heard me or not; with half a dozen hags shrieking and spitting in his face, he may have understood only my general meaning.

A trifle pale but very steady, he drew his Colts. "Pick Haskins up, Pike," he ordered. "Make for high ground with him—but don't appear hurried."

Despite the limp hundred and seventy-five pounds that I carried, I managed to make a display with my revolver. We broke through and got out of the circle of tepees with nothing more serious than bad stone bruises. Inspector Norrys pointed out a low granite swell halfway to the watershed and bade me carry Haskins there. He himself stayed behind, risking bullets in order to cover my escape.

Our first thought when we reached the granite swell was about Haskins. With several long knife slashes and that musket slug at point-blank range, he was in bad shape. The Skunk-Bear's bullet had entered the side of his neck and gone halfway around, missing the jugular vein by a sheer miracle.

Norrys tore open the Service kit and fell to work. He was deft and practiced; a surgeon could have been no more skillful than he was. The neck wound was so seri-

ous that it would have meant death within the hour, but Norrys stopped the bleeding in a few minutes by sewing cotton, dusted with caustic, into the wound itself.

When the other stabs and cuts had been washed with antiseptic and sewed up, Haskins opened his eyes. They were full of the blank questioning of one who comes to under strange circumstances.

"You mustn't try to talk, Haskins," Norrys said quietly. "You might start that neck wound bleeding again. Just lie quiet; we're all right now." Briefly he told Haskins what had happened and assured him that the Skunk-Bears would carry him back to Valour on a litter.

The gentle sympathy that Norrys showed the young constable was a revelation to me; I had always thought him granite-hard and a bit domineering. This hidden trait of gentleness, I think, must have been akin to his distaste for violence toward the Tinnehs.

Back at the camp the Tzuhl-Tinnehs were making "smoke talk" with wet moss and blankets. I drew Norrys aside, knowing that if Haskins realized the plight we were in, he would try to get up and lend a hand.

"Sir," I said, "that smoke signal means they're calling in their men who are out hunting. And that means they intend to attack us. We ought to look around for a place where we won't be wide-open to slugs and arrows."

"But they won't attack us, Sergeant," Norrys said simply, with complete conviction in his voice. "If they had meant to kill us, they would have finished us off

there in the camp. But they didn't. If Haskins had not been hasty, we would have won our point and taken our prisoners peacefully."

"*They* would have finished *us* off, if half of their hunters hadn't been gone," I argued. "Besides, it takes time for an Indian to work himself up to a fight. That's what's happening now; they're beating the blood *sow-yunga* against us."

Norrys shook his head. "Give them a little time and they'll come to their senses. In the meanwhile, we'll stay here. If we move to a better location, it will show them that we expect a fight. They mustn't think we expect that."

There was no arguing with him. His very conviction almost swerved me around to his way of thinking. But soon I began to suspect again that he was wrong. And fatally wrong this time.

By twos and threes the hunters came slipping back to camp, till their number was double what it had been. It was terrific odds, even with our superior rifles. If they had a mind to, they could rush our swell and club us in a twinkling. Or if they lacked the courage for a charge, they could surround us and starve us out in a day or two.

It was not until after I counted and recounted the hunters that I thought of Wilson. When I looked toward his hill, only a hundred yards to our right, he was walking down the terrace toward the Indian camp. I expected to see him shot down, but evidently the Tzuhl-Tinnehs recognized him. He walked right into their camp, spoke for a few minutes with the subchief,

went on to the lake for water, and then walked back to his hill unmolested.

"What are they going to do?" I called across to him.

He shook his head. It might have meant anything.

"Why don't you come over here?" I demanded. "If they get us, they'll get you too, to keep word of it from leaking out."

Wilson said nothing. He did not even shake his head.

"I'm going to talk to these Indians again," Norrys said quietly. "They know very little about the Force. If I can make them understand that we are not two men, but two million if necessary—"

With hands extended, palms out, he walked a few rods down the slope. The camp silenced. Norrys spoke for ten minutes. Chiefly he dwelt on the Law, hammering at them the idea that the Force never failed to do what it set out to do. It was a superb harangue. When he came back, he seemed completely confident that the heaven would work in their minds.

After some talk among the hunters, the subchief came halfway toward our swell and gave us the Tinneh answer.

The talk about the Force was like the empty talk of the split-tongue *wheeskeejaun*. His people had always made their own law. He had spoken with the oldest man in the tribe, who said that his father's father could not remember any law but that of their own lodges.

They would continue that law. The white men had come to their camp and reddened the ground with the blood of one of their warriors. If the white men would give them the young man with the neck wound so

that they could even up the blood score, they would let the other two go back to their lodges in peace. Otherwise, none of the white men would go back. Their bones would whiten the sphagnum moss and the lemmings would nest in their skulls.

I think this last savage threat had some effect on Norrys. It began to dawn on him that possibly the Tzuhl-Tinnehs were in a dangerous mood.

As he watched the camp through his binoculars, he asked me, "By the way, Pike, how many cartridges have you for your Ross?"

"A magazine full and ten in my belt. Why?"

"Nothing, except—well, the rest were in Haskins' pack."

It caught me like a plexus punch. Not once had I thought about our extra cartridges in the pack that had been torn from Haskins. Between us, we had only twenty-odd cartridges for our .303's.

"Don't look so glum about it, Pike," Norrys remarked. "All the ammunition we'll probably need is for hunting on our way back to Valour; and we've plenty for that."

His stubborn blindness made me angry again.

"Did you hear that subchief's last words?" I demanded. "Don't you see what's going on down there in the camp? Those men are tying up their hair and throwing off their clothes, in spite of the mosquitoes. That means they're bent on a fight, and it won't be long coming."

Norrys took no offense at my anger. Evidently he did not blame me for being afraid; even though he thought my fears were groundless.

"Probably they themselves fully believe they're going to attack us. They'll work themselves up to a certain pitch, but then they'll break. Not to use any fancy speech, Sergeant, but it's like a bird fluttering and cackling around a motionless snake; if we just sit here watching them, and pay no attention to their threats, we'll charm them helpless."

Ordinarily there might have been some sense to his suggestion. But this was not "ordinarily." Norrys had hardly finished speaking before the Tinnehs gave the lie to his words. One group of men, armed with guns and caribou spears, moved out from the camp and circled closer, on our left, while the others came circling toward us on our right.

"Before they get close enough to open up with those trade guns," I said, "I'm going to stop them."

"Shoot over or around them," Norrys ordered. "Show them what we can do if they try to charge us. But no killing."

"And waste our .303 cartridges?"

"My orders, please," Norrys snapped. "If you disobey, the consequences to you will be serious."

At that moment I did not give a hang about any such trifle as getting busted or even getting cashiered out of the Service. What stayed my trigger finger was the fact that I couldn't be dead sure that Norrys was wrong. He had had years of experience with Indians. The Division rated him as its best man for dealing with the non-treaty tribes. And he seemed, here, to know exactly what he was doing.

Down the slope the Tzuhl-Tinnehs fanned out in the bear grass and began to snake toward us. When they

were three hundred steps away, they started shooting. It was a harmless fusillade at that distance, but it showed exactly what they meant to do to us.

Norrys gave the word, and we started dropping bullets around them, closer and closer. They wavered and halted. The inspector dropped his last bullet so close that it drove gravel into the face of one of the Skunk-Bears.

That was the farthest wash of the wave. A minute or two later the Tzuhl-Tinnehs started backing down the slope and retreating toward their tepees.

"You see, they didn't have the nerve, Pike," Norrys said. He smiled a little at me, but not at all triumphantly. "They'll start their oratory now, and by noon they'll be turning over our prisoners to us."

The Tzuhl-Tinnehs did have their inevitable oratory—an endless lot of it. But the results were not what Norrys had prophesied. The long powwow was not about *whether* to attack us but *how*.

Shortly before noon the squaws began taking down the leather tents. The jerky and other meat were bundled into skin bags; tepees and canoes were piled onto the backs of the women. In half an hour a strange caravan of squaws, dogs, and children was filing back into the illimitable Barrens.

But the men did not leave. Clustered around several mosquito smudges, they were cleaning their guns and sharpening their long, wicked skinning knives.

I said to Norrys, "You know what it means when Indians send their wives and children away like that? When you can see 'em fixing to wipe us out, can't you

believe it even then? And look—five rifle cartridges left, and then nothing but our Colts— All because we shot to scare 'em.”

Norrys merely said, “You might dig a shallow place for Haskins, to lessen the chances of his getting hit by a stray bullet.”

I dug, while the Tzuhl-Tinnehs finished readying their weapons and screwing up their courage. As plain as daylight—to anybody but Inspector Norrys—they were going to start up that terrace in a few minutes and do for us.

I called to Wilson. He was actually looking in another direction, but turned at my voice.

“Wilson, we’re out of cartridges for the Ross’s. For heaven’s sake, come over here and help us out!”

He shook his head.

“Then go down and try to get our cartons from the Indians.”

Another refusal.

“Then give us your own beltful.”

A last refusal. His heartless unconcern made me want to drive a bullet across at him. There was some excuse for the Tzuhl-Tinnehs. Lawless, primitive Indians, they looked on us as intruders, who had slain one of their kin without reason. But for Wilson there was no such excuse. He was white-skinned and one of our party. His cold-blooded indifference to our getting killed seemed to put him beyond the human pale.

Norrys must have read the thoughts passing in my mind.

“You shouldn’t blame him too harshly, Pike,” he

said quietly. "He's been waiting ten years for this moment. You see, Wilson was once an inspector in the Mounted."

I gasped. "W-h-a-t! An inspector—Wilson?"

"Yes. One of the youngest and most promising officers in the Force. But then he got cashiered, with a blackened reputation. He was charged with needlessly slaughtering some Nahani Indians, over in the sub-Arctic Rockies."

He gave Haskins another pain-killer tablet to keep him drugged and oblivious of our danger, and laved the youngster's hot forehead with water from his canteen.

"How was this—about Wilson?" I said to him.

"He was a sergeant, then," Norrys said. "He was sent into the Peace country to map the foothills and establish a post. He did such good work that he was made an inspector and given charge of that territory. A band of Nahani men, somewhat like these Skunk-Bears, was suspected of killing several sourdoughs in that country. With a young sergeant and a constable, Wilson went after and found them, had trouble with their tribe and shot it out. He killed not only the men he'd gone after, but two or three of the other Nahanis.

"He reported that the bloodshed was absolutely necessary to save their own lives and to get the malefactors. But his sergeant reported differently. You see, those two men had different philosophies, which made them come to utterly different conclusions about the same incident. When the sergeant made his report, an investigation was started. It ended in Wilson's being disgraced and drummed out of the Force."

I crouched there silent, thinking about that bitter

turn in Wilson's life, years ago. I could not believe that Wilson had shot down those Nahanis without honestly feeling that he had to do it to save his two men and himself. Perhaps he had been right. Perhaps the Nahani incident had been one of those exceptions to the rule that firmness without violence was better than bullets. And perhaps his sergeant had believed, as Inspector Norrys did here, that there were no exceptions to that rule.

Whatever the truth about that, it was plain that during all the embittered years since, Wilson had been waiting for a situation like the one we were in. That was why he'd come along as our scout; he'd known that the Tzuhl-Tinnehs were dangerous. Now he was sitting across on that ridge-top and watching the grim tableau. Watching the death battle that would prove he'd been right in that other case. This was the man's revenge!

When the Tzuhl-Tinnehs started up the slope at us, not yelling but ominously silent, I glanced at Norrys. Thus far in the business, his cool certainty had reassured me in the face of every proof of hostility; and I looked to him for reassurance now. With a jolt, I saw from his sharp breathing that his certainty had left him. He too realized, at last, that firmness without violence was not the answer here. This business had come down to the arbitrament of rifles.

Together we eased young Haskins into the inadequate shelter I had dug, and together we turned to meet the rush. The five remaining cartridges were in my rifle. Norrys took the gun from my hands.

"I'm a better shot with the Ross," he said in his quiet

way. "You take the Colts, Pike." And then he added, in the forthright way of an utterly honest man who is big enough to admit a mistake, "Sergeant, *I was wrong.*"

It was only later that I understood the full, portentous meaning of those three simple words.

Halfway up the slope the Tinnehs leaped to their feet, yelling like naked fiends, and came at us in the final rush. Those who had guns were blazing away at us as they came. I heard a grunt from Inspector Norrys and knew he had been hit, but he did not flinch. With his gray eyes on the howling figures washing up the slope, he lifted the rifle and took steady aim.

One of the Indians, out in front, was brandishing the Mounted tunic which they had stripped from young Haskins. With his first shot, Norrys dropped that Indian. His second and third wounded two more. But his fourth shot missed; I glanced at him to see why. A slug had caromed off a granite rock and plowed along his scalp, and he had missed because of the blood trickling into his eyes. He wiped it away and shot again, and that last bullet sent one of the Skunk-Bears cartwheeling.

Then he took up his Colts, and together we waited for the Tinnehs to reach good hand-gun range. It was then I noticed the strange thing—those Tinnehs were still dropping. Neither Norrys nor I was shooting, and yet man after man of the Indians were stumbling, falling. In those moments I could not understand; I could only watch with bewildered eyes. It was as though some miracle had intervened in our behalf and was striking down our enemies with an invisible hand.

One small knot of the hunters came within Colt range, and Norrys opened on them— Only three of them were on their feet when he finished, and they were scrambling back down the hill like scurrying rabbits.

I saw the main charge slow down and waver. Two or three of them, out in front, crumpled and fell as the invisible hand struck them down. The others began backing up. Norrys reloaded, stood up in bold view, and poured a spatter of bullets at them. Almost as one man, the whole pack of them turned around, panic-stricken, and went streaming down the slope.

Norrys silently motioned me to look at the little hill, and then I saw Wilson walking toward us. I saw him reloading his smoking Ross, and then I knew that the miracle that had saved Norrys and Haskins and myself was that deadly rifle in Wilson's hands.

He plunked another shot or two at the fleeing Tinehs, and at the imperious gesture of his rifle, they stopped, near the lake landwash.

While I wiped the blood from Inspector Norrys' face and bandaged the jagged scalp wound, Wilson came walking across to us, erect and calm, as if to martial music.

Constable Haskins, rising on elbow, and I, standing almost between the two men, saw the finale.

They were deep-souled men, both of them—Inspector Norrys and Scout Wilson. They were cleanhearted men of high and strong principles, without petty spite or petty hatred between them. That they could have kept their secret from us during those long weeks of

the patrol is one of the things that passes understanding.

"My thanks to you, Wilson, for helping bring those murderers to justice," Norrys said.

Wilson laughed—if you want to call it a laugh. "Justice! I also got justice, once!"

"Then my thanks for saving our three lives."

Wilson laughed again, mockingly. "Do you think I shot them down, those Indians, to save your three lives? Paugh!"

The inspector's voice dropped to a whisper. "Why then did you do it—Wilson?"

It was strange to see tears start from the eyes of a man such as Wilson.

"Could I see the Force disgraced by a pack of Tinnahs?" he demanded.

As I watched them confronting each other, I could feel that something tremendous stood between those two. Something still unsaid. I looked from one to the other, bewildered, waiting. It was Wilson who spoke, and his slow, bitter words shook me like the jar of an avalanche.

"After this battle here, Norrys, what do you think about that battle of ours with the Nahanis that time, over on the Peace? And the report on it, the report that broke me. The report *you* made, Norrys."



Corporal Nat

Hungry and tired, Corporal Nat swung out of his saddle in front of the Mounted barracks, drew his Snider carbine from its saddle bucket, and mopped his face with a big red bandanna. A short "Squaw Winter" ten days ago had turned the Alberta Plains sere and dusty, but the cold snap had passed and the Indian Summer afternoon was warm and lazy, with the prairie sky a smoky blue and heat waves dancing over the hard-packed sod of the Police quadrangle.

Constable Bill Featherof, who had been leaning against the barracks door, walked up and took the black mare by the bridle.

"I'll put 'er away, Corp. You go in and grab a bite to eat. Looks like you've had a hard patrol."

"Thanks, Bill. You're not exaggerating."

Featherof jerked a thumb at the clapboard cabin of Inspector Saunders, their Officer Commanding. "Silent wants to see you right away, Corp."

"For what?" Nat demanded.

Featherof clucked to the mare. "'Un't know. Guess it's about this trouble in the railroad camps. It's getting worse. A couple of Big Augers come and talked with Silent this morning."

"Hell!" Nat spat viciously. "I wish they'd get that blasted railroad built!"

He strode to the rainspout hogshead, washed his face and hands, splashed water over his red hair, and went inside the sprawling, split-log barracks.

Constable Hardy, who was guarding a pair of bad Crows that Corporal Nat had rounded up the day before, rustled him some bread, maple syrup, and a hunk of moose a good Crow had brought in.

"Bill tells me the trouble in the railroad camps is looking worse, Hardy," Nat observed, between bites nearly the size of his fist.

"Bet your grandma it's worse. Most of the navvies have left the construction outfits and collected in Moc-casin. I walked over there this morning. It's an ugly crowd in town."

"I don't blame the navvies," the corporal snapped.

"These subcontractors haven't paid 'em since July. If the navvies quit, they lose their back wages; that's law—the Masters and Servants Act. If they stick, they're working for nothing. Only thing they *can* do is go on a tear. If a railroad iron was lapped around some of these Big Augers' necks, they might come to taw and cough up the wages."

"Well, it's none of our mix-in," Hardy said thankfully.

Nat pushed back his chair and fished in his pocket for a goose-quill toothpick. "No, and it isn't going to be. Anyhow, not *my* mix-in. I'll herd stray cattle and Indians back onto their range, but I'll play heck driving these navvies back to camp for the benefit of those plutegewumps. What's Silent got on tap for me this afternoon, Hardy?"

"I cain't say. Go see."

Nat strode past the stables to the clapboard cabin, knocked at the door and went in, and saluted his Officer Commanding at the rough table-desk.

Inspector and corporal were both six-footers, but their resemblance ended sharply at that. Saunders was slim, carefully dressed, without a shade of sunburn, and aristocratic in his manner and speech. Nat was husky, roughened, Western in his ways, and tanned to the color of his saddle.

"Sit down please, Corporal," Saunders bade him. "First, have you anything to report from your patrol today?"

Nat slumped into a chair and dropped his floppy hat on the floor beside him. "Not much, sir. I put out two small fires in the Salt Hills. Saw a band of fifty-eight

buffaloes heading south on Brush Crick. Found where a pair of grizzlies had killed a settler's two cows and a calf—which the Indians'll probably get blamed for. A herd of twenty-some horses crossed at Boggy Ford. If it wasn't the *remuda* of Karshner's ranch going to meet the Montana steers they bought, it must have been some horse-rustling outfit heading for the Border. I'd have followed, but my mare was beginning to tire."

Saunders wrote careful notes. "I'm sorry to give you extra duty today, Corporal," he said, as he blotted the page. "But I shouldn't like to entrust this work to anybody except you. I want you to go into Moccasin this afternoon—"

"For what?" Nat burst out. Then he recollected his discipline manners and added, "Yes, sir. Why so, sir?"

"Practically all the laborers working for the sub-contractors have quit—the haulers, the grading crews, and the men who were getting out ties from the hills. Construction work on the railroad has already slowed down, and may halt altogether. The dissatisfied men are trying to persuade the main-line crews to cease work also. They've gathered in Moccasin and are even threatening to destroy railroad property. Last night a hanger on the tracks five miles east of here derailed a work engine. The officials have had to post guards at all bridges and patrol the tracks regularly.

"The trouble," Silent went on, "centers in Moccasin. The ringleaders there are stirring up the laborers to acts of violence. I have the names of the three principal ones: Baptiste Maligne, Jules Grouard, and an English half-breed called Charley Blackfoot. These half-breeds are not strikers themselves, but they want

to see the railroad work stopped because the line will eventually wipe out their freight-hauling occupation.

"Besides these three, there's a character called Montana Burgoon, a gunman who has a reputation down in the States. The half-breeds are waving him in front of the crowd as a leader, and his open violation of all law is setting a dangerous example. If we can arrest the three 'breeds and Burgoon and bring them in, the strike will be broken and the laborers can be induced to return—"

Nat interrupted, with considerable heat. "The quickest way to get the navvies to working again and stop this trouble is for the subcontractors to pay 'em their back wages. The railroad itself isn't having trouble with its men. It pays 'em regular and treats 'em decent."

Saunders frowned and looked at him steadily a moment. Nat returned the stare, just as steadily.

The inspector did not deign to argue, but continued in his cool, even voice: "I want you to take Constables Hardy and Featherof and arrest those four men this afternoon, Corporal. Go in armed for trouble, but try to avoid it if at all possible. This Burgoon is a typical desperado from the western American territories. Be careful with him."

"I don't think it's right to force the navvies back to work and not force the subcontractors to pay 'em what's owing 'em," Nat objected. "It's taking sides. The wrong side, to boot."

Saunders' eyebrows arched at this surprising speech. Corporal Nat usually accepted any duty, however dangerous or unwelcome, without a word of protest. But

this order violated a deep-rooted notion of justice in him; of justice to underdogs.

"Allow me to point out, Corporal," Saunders said coldly, "that I am not taking sides. I am protecting property and quelling disturbances, which is my duty. Yours, I may remind you, is to obey orders."

"I've been in this Service long enough to know that," Nat whipped back, beginning to see red. "But I've got some human feelings left! We can force them poor navvies back to work, because winter's just ahead and they're stranded out here, but why don't we first get busy and find a way to pry fair play out of the subcontractors?"

"Your orders," Saunders interrupted sharply, snubbing the attempt to argue, "are to go in to Moccasin and arrest those four men. Are you going to obey, or not?"

It was a square-put question, with no avoiding a flat answer one way or the other. For moments Nat wavered. Orders were almost sacred with him, but so was the right of all men to square treatment.

What angered him most was Saunders' refusal to admit that the navvies had been treated unjustly, or to stir a finger in their behalf. Whether he meant to or not, Saunders was playing into the subcontractors' hands. He leaned toward the Big Augers anyway, Nat felt. He had not come from the mud-sill stratum, and had little sympathy for the underdog's struggle.

"Your record is exemplary, Corporal," Saunders remarked, his tone a trifle more friendly and persuasive. He watched the hot emotions which were so clear on

Nat's face. "I shouldn't like to see it smirched, after all these years of splendid service."

Nat scorned the appeal. "What's a bad record or a turn in the jug?" he demanded. "That don't mean much to me. But if I'd be a party to bulldozing these navvies, I couldn't associate with myself no more."

Saunders tried another tack. "This Montana Burgoon has openly defied the Force, Corporal. He has boasted of what he intends to do to the first Yellow-Stripe who attempts to arrest him. I chose you because you are the most likely to succeed."

Nat looked up at the words "defied the Force." He had been in the Service ever since McLeod and French made their historic wagon trek across the Canadian prairies to the Foothills; and his loyalty to the Force burned warm and steady.

Saunders tapped the table and waited. Finally Nat growled, "Orders are orders. I'll go. But understand this: I'd rather do a turn in the jug. If that gunman defied the Force, I'll bring him in. I'll get the navy leaders too, because it's orders. But I've got to say I don't think you're playing square."

Saunders reddened. "That will be sufficient, Corporal. You may go."

Nat grabbed his Stetson and kicked the chair back as he got up. "Just one other thing, Inspector," he barked. "My time's up day after tomorrow. You asked me once if I was going to sign on again, and I said yes. But now, just have my discharge papers ready. If I've got to be a party to raw deals like this, I *quit!*"

Saunders did not look up. "Very well, Corporal. Your papers will be ready . . ."

Half an hour later Corporal Nat was tramping the rutty cart road toward Moccasin. He had left his rifle at quarters, and had hidden his Enfield revolver in his shirt. He wore a walking-out uniform, minus the conspicuous red tunic. He went afoot because he expected to bring back four prisoners.

Behind him at a whisper distance trudged Constables Hardy and Featherof. They wore regulation dress and carried Snider carbines in shoulder slings.

"The corp's surelee rearing straight up on his hind legs," Hardy observed in a careful whisper. "Wonder what busted between him and Silent?"

"I cain't say. But Nat's mad all through. Hopping mad. He won't use his bean on this job ahead. I'm afraid he'll try some plumb *pelton* stunt with Montana Burgoon and them three *métis*. We'll have to watch him."

Hardy agreed and asked for a pipeful of fine-cut. Just ahead lay a narrow wooden bridge, and a hundred yards beyond rose the first straggling shacks of Moccasin.

"Nothing's better than a pipe going well when you're in a tight squeeze," Hardy remarked. "And you can smoke this—we're *going* to be in a tight squeeze. A pipe gives you an easy, not-afraid appearance. D'you mind the time Sergeant Monk sat on a bridge smoking and held back a bunch of Bloods that wanted to get across and whale blazes out of a gang of South Pieigans?"

"I mind."

On the first plank of the bridge, Corporal Nat stopped flat-footed and pivoted toward his detail.

"You two stay here," he ordered crisply. "I'm going in alone."

"You are like heck!" the detail exclaimed together.

"What's that?" Nat demanded. "What d'you say?"

"I say, Corp, what's the bouncing idea?" Featherof asked. "It'll take all three of us to arrest them four and bring 'em through that crowd of navvies. That's why Silent sent us along."

"Don't be a fool, Corp," Hardy put in. "We don't know what you're on the tear about, but we're with you, anyway. You can't shake us. If anybody's going to get shot, we want to be in on that."

Nat clicked his jaws. "My orders. Don't make me repeat 'em."

"Now I say, old man," Featherof insisted, "I think you're not treating us friendly."

"You're taking your spite out on us," Hardy chimed in.

"No, I'm not," Nat loosened up enough to explain. "If all three of us go in, the crowd'll know something's up. They'll warn our men, or mob us, or do both. If I go in alone, I'll stand a chance of locating that quartet and snaking them away without much fuss. You was in town alone this morning, Hardy. That's what gave me the idea."

"But I say, Corp—" both men protested.

"Say nothing! It's four months in the butter-tub for disobeying. You stay here, like you're ordered."

"You hotheaded, hard-nosed—"

"Redheaded boob!"

"Is that a blooming haead on your shoulders?"

"Or just your stubborn neck haired over?"

"I'll jug you two for that!" Nat promised hotly. He turned on his heel and stumped across the bridge.

"But I say, Corp—" There were tears in the voices of the two deserted constables as Nat passed out of earshot. . . .

Moccasin, a mushroom Sodom of a creeping Steel End, was two more or less parallel lines of houses with a quagmire street in between. It was a raw, frontier town of log houses, flimsy frames, and tin imitation stone. Church nor school had had the effrontery to crowd into the cluster of saloons, dance halls, gambling dens, and trading stores.

The wagon road up which Corporal Nat came, with the afternoon sun in his face, ran flush into the center of the street, making a big T. A bowshot below the bridge, half a dozen families of non-treaty Indians had put up their painted buffalo-skin lodges along the creek bank, with their broomtail ponies picketed to Red River carts. To the right of the wagon trail stood the white tents of eight or nine self-respecting prospectors homing for the States.

Nat threw a swift look up and down the street. In front of each saloon stood knots of men, mostly navvies in brown denims, and a restless stream of others were moving along the plank walks. There was a sprinkling of bull-train drivers and buffalo hunters, and a few cow outfits were in town, their well-saddled mounts standing heads together, reins down, in front of buildings. An Indian squaw, too old to excite quips from the crowd, was peddling fresh buffalo *placottes*.

Several men stared at the corporal as he passed. They nudged one another and stopped talking, watch-

ing him out of the tails of their eyes. He walked into the first building on his left—the Ram’s-Horn Bow. The air was too thick with smoke for any but the nearest tables to see him; but at these tables the drinking and talking stopped, and the silence spread on back.

Nat edged up to a clear place at the bar and ordered a small beer.

“Where’s Montana Burgoon?” he asked the proprietor, as the beer was set before him.

“’Un’t know,” was the surly answer.

“You lie natural and easylike,” Nat growled at the man, whom he had once raided for selling “permit” to Indians. “You don’t have to tell me, but you’d better keep your trap shut about my asking. Get that?”

The men at the nearest table rose and followed him out. He tried the next saloon, with no better luck.

He went into the dozen saloons and gambling houses on that side of the street. Nobody knew anything about Montana or the three half-breeds. The manager of the small Bay store acted friendly, but could tell him nothing. A couple of the other proprietors jeered him openly.

Nat was coolheaded enough not to start a fight. But he remembered the jeers and cursed at the thought that he was going out of the Service in forty-eight hours.

By the time he was half through with his rounds, a considerable crowd was on his heels, wise to his mission. They ganged up at the door, jostled him when he came out, and tried to shoulder him off the planks into the mud. Two hulking ’breeds blocked him on a narrow plank. Nat stopped, backed up, and gave them a

chance to cross. They planted themselves in the middle.

"Hi say," a navvy piped up, "look wot 'e's got hon 'is bloody laigs! Yaller stripes! They houghtta be hon 'is bloody back!"

The remark stirred Nat so much that he knocked one half-breed off the plank and *stared* the other out of his way.

He could excuse the navvies; they were in a pitiful situation. All of them were broke and many were hungry, for the saloons refused to show them the lunch counter after their few coins were gone. The railroad refused to take them back to the Eastern cities, and so they were stranded. Ill-fitted for the frontier, they were being shuttled about like cattle. But to Nat, they were men with sensibilities as deep as the sensibilities of the men who shuttled them. In their situation they were good tinder for any spark to set afire.

He crossed the street on a cinder walk and continued his search. By this time half the town had an eye on him. He canvassed all the saloons, but couldn't find his men. Even if he could, he wondered, how would he get away from the crowd? But he took his worries one by one. The first was to find Burgoon and the three half-breeds.

He recrossed the street and went back to Jenks' saloon. Proprietor "Hi" Jenks was one of the men who had jeered at him. Nat pushed past the bar crowd to the dancing corner.

"Hello, Sula," he greeted a damsel of thirty-odd winters, who was breathless from a dance with a clumsy tie boss. "What say to a drink?"

"What a surprise," Sula Liz flipped back. "Mommy's Little Red Rider drinking! But sure."

They found a table to themselves. Jenks advanced upon them, fire in his eye and a bung starter in his hand.

"Tell him to go to the devil," Nat advised. "You won't regret it. I've got something worth your knowing."

Sula Liz gave Jenks a cut of her tongue. The proprietor glared at her and at the husky corporal, thought better of his intentions, and backed off toward his bar.

"What's up, honey?" Sula asked anxiously, keeping an eye on the proprietor's retreating rotundity.

Nat winced at the endearment, but said, "Just this. The Mounted is going to raid this place as soon as the navvies get out of town. Too much shooting here. Also, it's headquarters for 'permit' trade going north to the Indians, and for smuggling from across the Border. Better change homes till the raid's over; Inspector Saunders is going to ship the girls out of the district or soak 'em six months."

Sula Liz's eyes widened. "Is that straight—friend to friend?"

"Friend to friend," Nat answered. "Now, where's Burgoon and the three 'breeds I'm after?"

"In the White Buffalo, back room to your right. But where's your men, Natty?"

Nat rose, slid his chair under the table, and pushed his full glass toward Sula Liz. "I'm alone. Thanks for the tip."

"You're crazy!" She put her hand on his arm and spoke sincerely. Her youth and beauty had departed

long since, but she still had a woman's softness about bloodshed. "You *mustn't* go alone. Montana's a two-gun man, Nat, and he's lightning on the draw. Those 'breeds with him are ugly. Wait—Natty boy; don't—"

Natty boy hurried on out of the saloon. By way of shielding Sula Liz, he searched two more places before going into the White Buffalo. . . .

The door of the rear gambling room opened an inch, softly, and six inches of blue steel poked through. Baptiste Maligne suddenly stopped shuffling the cards. His mouth flew open; the cards dropped.

"*S'pristi!*" he hissed, half rising.

Montana Burgoon, a big pock-marked man in leather coat and pants, sat facing the door. At the first hint of trouble, his hands started toward his hips. But they stopped. The little blue-steel hole was looking him straight between the eyes. Behind the hole he heard a sharp metallic *sn-ii-ck* that jarred even his callous nerves.

"Jack 'em high, Montana," said a voice behind the click.

Montana complied. There was nothing else to do. A boot-toe thrust into the crack, the door opened, and Corporal Nat stepped inside, closing it behind him.

His left eye seemed to look over the barrel of his gun and keep it pointed at the spot where Montana's bushy eyebrows met. His right eye seemed to take in the three *métis* and the card table. Montana's chip pile was almost down to the boards; he had evidently been trimmed handsomely, from the looks of the other three piles.

"Your guns, Montana," Nat ordered. "No, don't draw

'em out of the holsters by the butts. Haven't you learned better manners than to hand over your guns thataway? You'll get shot someday for that. Unbuckle your belt. That's better."

He leaned across the table to take the belt. He had eyes for nothing but Montana's hands, which plainly were itching for a split-wink grab at the ivory butts. Blackfoot, who had been sitting with his back to the door when Nat entered, had stepped barely aside. The instant Nat got hold of the belt, the English 'breed's long arm shot out and grabbed the corporal's gun hand. Montana suddenly tilted the massive piece of oak and crashed it against the intruder. Nat's gun spurted twice—into the plank ceiling. Maligne whipped out an ugly-looking blade.

"Stop it!" Montana bellowed. "He's my meat. I'll stretch him colder'n a dead dog's nose."

Maligne, aiding Blackfoot, knocked the gun out of Nat's hand as the corporal tried to twist it down for a shot. The English 'breed crumpled backward from Nat's terrific, short-traveling rib punch. Montana pushed Maligne aside. Afraid of the desperado, the 'breeds backed into three safe corners, watching the fight.

Nat's left snapped out and landed on Montana's jaw with the crack of a flat board against a building. He ducked a six-foot swing and connected with a one-two punch that ought to have stopped an ox. Burgoon shook his head and came in for more. Nat gave him more. Montana looked surprised. His swings missed; he fell into a hug to avoid the battering rams.

They smashed each other in the ribs with short jabs

that drew grunts from both. They kicked shins with heavy hobnails, trying to knock each other's footing loose. Neither could topple the other. They broke. Nat's left traveled across to Montana's cheek and opened an old knife scar. Burgoon landed an ear swing that rattled every bone in the corporal's body.

Maligne sidled from his corner to grab up Nat's revolver. Burgoon thundered at him, in good Montana dialect, "Stop it, yer blowsy coyote! I'll knock yer block off! He's my meat! *Uch—uch!*"

"His meat" had crashed over another one-two punch that snapped Burgoon's head back upon his shoulders. Then Montana's right swing that started down behind his knees caught Nat flush on the jaw. It would have lifted the turret off a battleship; it raised the corporal's dander.

Convinced that neither could win by a blow, they began to fight.

They measured their arm-reach, stood off, leaned toward each other, gave and took. Nat's anger had cost him and lost him what little Queensberry he knew. Burgoon didn't know any; his specialty was guns. But his fists packed the strength of an angry grizzly. It was a hard-knuckle fight, a wearing-down, battering-down fight. They hit for the face in Western style, trading smack for smack.

Ordinarily Montana would have been more than a match for the corporal. He had the bigger bulk, the longer reach, the tougher frame. But he was a quarter-seas-over on booze not fit to pickle a sidewinder, and his wind was so short that he wheezed like a wind-broken pinto running uphill with a bellyful of new

clover. A few minutes of slugging, a brace of plexus punches, started him slipping. Nat's arms telescoped straight out from the shoulders, each blow landing, each loaded with stars and fireworks.

The fight was free, anything went. Montana lowered his head and lunged. The corporal had no room to sidestep. They grappled. Nat threw Montana heavily to the floor by a dexterous hip twist. Montana flopped over, got to his feet again, and grabbed up a chair, a substantial oak affair.

"Game for two!" Nat blazed. "Chair's my long suit!"

He ducked under the first swing and came up with a chair for himself. The weapons rose and crashed; Montana's flew entirely to pieces. The corporal had a sizable rung left in his hands. He laid it solidly across Montana's head. Montana grunted, stumbled, and fell.

With their champion down, the *métis* came out of their corners with a rush. The corporal had no time to stoop for his gun; he kicked it and Montana's belt toward the door, and stood over them. Maligne flourished a blade. Nat saw it, knocked it spinning with a blow from the rung, and kicked Grouard in the stomach as Grouard stopped to grab a gun.

The three pitched into him with fists and boots. They were all good-sized men, tough, muscular—and fresh. Nat's arms were heavy, and his breathing came in stabs.

Montana raised his head off the floor, heaved up his shoulders, and saw what was happening. Corporal Nat was game against the heavy odds, but gameness couldn't save him. He was going down—a question of seconds. His punches lacked steam and he took three

for every one he gave. The 'breeds were kicking him viciously.

Montana blinked his eyes. "Stop it!" he bellowed. "Stop it! Three ter one ain't a man's game. He's my meat. I ain't licked. D'yer hear me, yer mangy coyotes?"

The 'breeds paid no attention. They were intent upon finishing off the redheaded Yellow-Stripe.

Montana reached for Blackfoot's leg. The half-breed snarled and kicked him loose. That was the deciding blow of the battle. It cleared Burgoon's brain of fog and brought him to his feet. He pushed through to the corporal.

Nat had one good solid poke left in his arm. He gave it to Montana, in the left eye.

"Great blue blazes!" Burgoon spluttered. "Stop it, Yaller-Stripe. I was on the wrong side. I knows a he-man when I sees one and feels his fist on my jaw, I does! Three ter one—the sneakin' coyotes. Buck up, partner. Let's give 'em hell!"

The fire-eating reinforcements, dramatic and unexpected, put new vigor in the corporal. He charged Blackfoot viciously, traded blows, and knocked the 'breed cold across the upset table. Then he whirled to help Montana, who had his hands full with the two big *métis*. Together they made short work of Maligne and Grouard. The pair went down, not knocked out, but whimpering for a surcease of the punishment.

"Whew!" Montana grunted, rubbing his left eye. "We gotta have a drink on 'at, Johnny."

"Buckle on your guns, Mac," Nat bade him. "No time

to drink now. We've got to get these 'breeds through the crowd of navvies."

"What's 'at? Yer come after them three?" Burgoon demanded incredulously. "I thought yer was after me! But I don't mind. I was out fer fun, and it was a powerful purty fight!"

He buckled on his belt while the corporal tied the hands of the *métis* and roped the three together with a short *babische* thong.

"Now then, Montana, we've got to keep moving. My men are waiting at the bridge. If we can make that, we're safe. You wave the mob off with your hardware. They're scared of you, but they're not of me. They think you can kill an even dozen men in three seconds. If they get too dangerous, don't hesitate to bore one or two. I'll see the law's behind you on that."

Burgoon's right eye widened. "What's 'at—the law? D'yer mean they yank a pusson in, up here in Canady, fer shootin' a feller?"

"Don't worry about that. Your job is to make a gangway for me and my prisoners. Now, you three," he snapped at the 'breeds, "you mosey right along. There'll be a pistol against your backs all the time. When I say hop, you hop. If you won't go into the post on shanks' mare, you'll go in a cart, and you won't feel the bumps, either."

The wildfire word had spread that the Mounted corporal had tracked down Montana Burgoon. Fully half a hundred men were milling about in the barroom of the White Buffalo, afraid to investigate. Montana was

known to be as careless as he was quick. His reputation was simply immense. Nat, his conqueror, being in his own country, was not held in such high esteem.

"Five to one Montana comes out alone," a born gambler bawled from his perch on the bar.

No one took him.

Then Burgoon stumped out, a gun in each hand and a wicked look in his good eye. A roar raised the roof. A second later dead silence fell. Behind him marched the corporal with the three trussed-up 'breeds.

If the navvies and saloon crowd had not been packed tight, they would have fallen over. A single glance told a strange tale. There was no mistake—Montana and the corporal were in cahoots!

"Don't make a move!" Montana growled to the roomful. "Git out of the road!"

Whirling a gun on one trigger finger, he marched straight into the mass of men. They separated like the waters of the Red Sea. Nat followed close on his heels, a muzzle against Maligne's backbone. He looked neither to right nor left; it took all his attention to guard his husky prisoners from making a break.

Before the petrified roomful could catch a second breath or lift a voice, the party of five reached the door. A couple of hundred men, navvies and 'breeds, were jammed against it, craning to see what was going on. They were slow to obey Montana's orders. His pistol barked once and knocked a hat off one of the tallest 'breeds. Those nearest the door pushed harder than those behind them and a space cleared. The party got out of the White Buffalo unscathed.

But the revolver shot let loose a frenzied tumult. It

was the signal for the navvies to raise the long yell and rescue their three leaders. They surged forward, howling and cursing.

"Step out," Nat ordered tersely, as his prisoners showed signs of balking. "Step lively or—"

The click of his Enfield completed the sentence. The three *métis* stepped. By quick action the party had almost bored through the crowd and only a few groups were ahead of them. But behind them an ugly roar welled up. It was the blind anger of men who nursed a just grievance. Who saw the law countenancing a rank injustice, as Nat had seen it. Who were egged on by individuals scheming for their own gain at cost of blood and violence.

Guns were drawn. Knives were out. It looked as if a company of soldiers could not check the charge.

"Burgoon," the corporal ordered coolly, "you get behind. Let me in front. Shoot the first man that lays a hand on us! We've got to get around the corner and down to the bridge."

Burgoon jumped to the rear, then started walking backward, still twirling his left gun. The idea of holding off two hundred men stirred the melodrama in his soul, and he rose to heights of gun glory. There was a deal of parade about his daredeviltry, but a sizable vein of steel fearlessness too, which came to the fore now. His blood-smeared face and swollen eye scarcely made him more angelic-looking. Abetted by his reputation, partly earned and partly built up by the three ringleaders, he was a regiment by himself.

A navvy with a spiked two-by-four dodged past him toward the corporal. The navvy went down with a

bullet through his shoulder—a bullet from that left gun which did not cease twirling gracefully on a fore-finger. The maddened crowd surged after them. It was a hundred yards to the bridge.

A 'breed with a revolver jumped out in front of the crowd. He raised his weapon and voice to lead a rush. At the bark of Montana's right gun, shot carelessly from the hip, the 'breed's revolver fell from his broken hand. Unable to face the sure death spat from Burgoon's guns, the crowd split to surround the party. Montana knocked the hats off the leaders. He could as easily have sent bullets through their brains.

Grim, silent, an ugly smile on his face, he was as much at ease as if he were knocking necks off whisky bottles for the delectation of tenderfeet. Not for nothing had the *métis* worked him up a vicious reputation! If the crowd had had him for a leader, they could have whipped three times the whole number of men at the Mounted post. But they lacked a man of half his caliber and dare; lacked a man who could look down a gun barrel at him. The nonchalant twirling of that left gun was more effective than a twelve-pounder, or a platoon of infantry. Montana Burgoon was doing his stuff!

Corporal Nat played his part as well. The slightest miscue would have been quick disaster. Over that last twenty-five yards he did not hurry, did not even look back, but stepped his prisoners along at a brisk, measured pace. He sensed the passionate, vengeful temper of the navvies behind him, shouting for "'is bloody 'eart." The thin hairs on the back of his neck rose up. He knew a dozen guns were pointed at him, and he ex-

pected one to go off. But still he kept his eyes ahead, on the bridge and his prisoners.

Constables Hardy and Featherof rose up from the far end and trotted across the bridge, their carbines at ready for trouble, their eyes popping. Between them filed the corporal and his prisoners. Montana, who had walked backward over that last hundred yards, fingered his belt for cartridges and reloaded his guns, one at a time. His face was cracked from ear to ear in a huge grin.

The crowd stopped in front of the carbines of Hardy and Featherof. Not a foot was set on the first plank of the bridge. Then the constables backed across, where Nat was waiting for them.

"My blessed eyes seen it, or I wouldn't believe it!" Constable Featherof breathed throatily.

"I say, if that redheaded fool's nerve wouldn't curl your hair—"

"Detail, fall in and escort the prisoners," the corporal snapped. "Make it lively. Hit the road. Hip!"

A safe distance beyond the bridge, Nat stepped up close to the unsuspecting Burgoon, who was tramping to the Mounted post because Moccasin was no longer a safe parade ground for him.

"I'll trouble you for that belt again, Montana," Nat said tersely. He thrust his Enfield against Burgoon's temple.

"What's 'at?" Montana gulped. "What the—"

"That's what I said. Unbuckle."

Burgoon's hands mechanically started toward his hips. The trigger on Nat's gun eared up.

"You're under arrest, Montana," Nat explained

crisply, relieving him of his belt. "I had orders to get you if I had to run you to Helena and back. Orders are orders. You're going in to the post. If you want to go in under your own steam, don't cut any didos."

It finally penetrated Montana's dull brain. His wrath gathered like a thundercloud. He turned dark red.

"Yer sneak-faced skunk, didn't I pitch in an' keep them 'breeds from maulin' yer inter the floor? Didn't I keep them navvies from stringin' yer higher'n the toppest tree in town? Then yer turn on me like this! I thought yer was a *man*, yer ongrateful, Yeller-striped Johnny Canuck!"

Nat's face went bloodless. He wet his lips and started to say something, but swallowed it and took the ignominy on his own shoulders.

"Shut up! Fall in there with the prisoners. Step out. Hip—hip."

Corporal Nat was sitting out in the stables, listening to his black mare crunching oats. He had come out there to escape the lurid epithets bestowed upon him by Montana Burgoon, who was locked in a temporary cell in the corner of the barracks. He could not bear hearing the bull voice of the man he had betrayed. He felt dirty, sick. Whenever he groaned, his black mare flipped her head out of the feed box and looked at him quizzically.

At deep dusk Constable Hardy appeared in the stall doorway.

"Corpl"

No answer.

"I say, Corp, Silent wants to see you."

"Tell 'im to go to blazes!"

Guided by the voice, Hardy came in and laid a hand on Nat's shoulder.

"Listen, old fox-top, friend to friend. A couple of Big Augers just rode up, and they're talking to Silent. I got a whiff of what's being said. Come on. I'll feed you an earful."

Hardy forced him out of the stables and across to the inspector's cabin. There was a candle inside, and the constable and Nat crouched beneath the open window.

Saunders' voice, clear and precise as always, came to them distinctly. From time to time they heard gasps of dismay from the Big Augers.

"You gentlemen"—Saunders was talking—"evidently do not realize how dangerous this Indian situation is. Your outlying camps are open to attack every hour of the day and night. Within fifty miles of here there are at least ten large bands of Bloods and Crows, numbering two thousand bloodthirsty warriors."

"I say," Hardy whispered, "isn't that a whopper for Silent to tell? There's about three dozen families around here, without the nerve to scalp a dead bossy. We've wiped out the bad bands of young bucks and chased the rest back to their reservations and salt horse."

Nat's ears were beginning to prick up. He poked Hardy to be quiet.

"These Indians fiercely resent the building of this railroad," Saunders continued dispassionately. "You have seen how the half-breeds resent it. The Indians are ten times worse, because it means the end of the buffaloes. They are only awaiting a chance to strike

and strike hard. If they discover that there is dissension among your men, if they discover that your crews have left the camps, you may rest assured that they will swoop down and destroy all the work that you have done—and make it utterly impossible for you to complete the various jobs by the time specified in your contracts. In other words, you will not be paid by the railroad. You would, therefore, lose several times as much money as you owe in back wages.

“You gentlemen perhaps do not realize that you are six hundred miles from any adequate protection. My handful of men cannot cope with a big outbreak. But your large crews can. Your only safety lies in the good will of your men—and their willingness to defend you.”

“I say,” Hardy broke out again, “cain’t Silent throw a scare and a half into them tenderfeet? I didn’t think he had it in him.”

“Of course,” Saunders concluded drily, “as you gentlemen have clearly pointed out to me in our previous discussions, I have no power to coerce you. As you say, the nearest court with that power is six hundred miles away. I can only advise you what to do. But I urge you, by all you hold sacred, to pay your men, engage their good will by generous treatment, and get them back to the camps immediately.

“This afternoon my most trusted man, at great personal danger and against a justifiable dislike of orders, went into Moccasin and arrested the ringleaders. Acts of violence are checked now, and that is all I can do. The rest is up to you. But, gentlemen, act before it is too late.”

"My heavens, if that is the situation— Why, we never dreamed—two thousand Indians—" the Big Augers gasped.

"That is the situation," Saunders assured them solemnly. "Shall I send a detail into Moccasin to tell your men that you will pay them?"

Corporal Nat pushed away Hardy's restraining hand, and rose up in time to see the Big Augers nod. They were a large-bellied pair, well fed, with gold log-chains under their stomachs, and each wore a blazing stone in the tie underneath his fourth chin. They were not at all like the lean head engineers of the main line or the quiet-spoken financiers who visited Steel End occasionally. Saunders shook hands with them and they left, still trembling.

A few minutes later Nat knocked on the door. He combed his hair with his fingers as he entered, and there was a stammer in his speech.

"Constable Hardy said you wanted to see me, sir."

"I do, Corporal. Sit down, please. I want to compliment you on the ability and courage you displayed this afternoon. Ordinarily it would merit you a substantial promotion. . . . I want also to ease your mind by telling you that the laborers will be paid in full and justly treated hereafter."

Nat gulped and choked back a confession of his eavesdropping.

"I have had the prisoners searched and have questioned them," the inspector continued. "Maligne and Grouard will receive nine months at hard labor. The English half-breed turned Crown evidence, in order to

lighten his sentence. Burgoon is guilty on five separate counts, totaling a penalty of one year and three thousand dollars."

Saunders picked up a shoe box from his desk and handed it to Nat, who was sitting tensely on the edge of his chair.

"That box contains Burgoon's guns and belt. It contains also a considerable number of American greenbacks. According to Blackfoot's evidence, the three half-breeds had cheated Burgoon out of this amount at the card game you interrupted.

"Burgoon would only answer my questions with oaths; but from Blackfoot and your constables, I learned the details of your arresting the prisoners and bringing them safely to the post. In view of Burgoon's championing you as he did, I feel that his sentence should be suspended. You will restore this money to him, please. Arrange for him to have a mount, and caution him not to wear his guns until he gets back across the Border."

Nat got to his feet somehow or other. His eyes dropped under Saunders' gaze. He remembered the hot charge he had flung at his superior not five hours before; and remembered the cool, diplomatic way in which Saunders, not five minutes ago, had secured justice for the navvies when all other ways were hopeless. He wanted to blurt out an apology. Instead, impulsively, he thrust out his hand.

Saunders took it in a firm clasp. His face thawed and he smiled broadly.

"Just a minute, Corporal. I have some papers ready for you to sign," he said, as he released the handshake.

Nat edged off to the door, the shoe box under his arm.

"I've got to get these things to Burgoon, sir, before he blows up and busts. If you don't mind, you can give them discharge papers to Constable Hardy. He needs a pipe-lighter. Said his cob went out on him while Montana and me were backing down toward that bridge."



The Long Shadow

For hours that August afternoon Sergeant David Kirke had been lying on the buffalo grass behind the Mounted Police barracks, his gray eyes troubled as he gazed at the Rockies a hundred miles westward. Under the evening sun the prairie and wild Alberta foothills were bluish hazy, as though from the camp smoke of Indian bands, and the dust of the great shaggy

herds that were vanishing out of sight to north and south stood out stark and clear.

Kirke's eyes were on those massive giants, but his thoughts went on beyond them—to the wilderness of mountains, valleys, and placer rivers west of the Great Divide. With the low-slanting sun inching down behind them, the lofty peaks of the Rockies were flinging long shadows far out across the rolling plains and making queer, darkish shapes in the summer-evening clouds. Now the shadows would seem like covered wagons lumbering across the prairie; now like Piegan warriors on their ponies, sullenly watching the caravan of the pioneers; now like the lone sentinel figure of a Mounted horseman, watching both the red hunter and the homesteading white man.

Abruptly a voice broke into Kirke's thought. "Sergeant Kirke! Sergeant David of the Dalhousie Kirkes! Where in consternation are you, Dave?"

As Constable "Dusty" Goff came breezing around the corner of the barracks, David closed the book that had lain in front of him unread, and got up slowly, his face hard with determination. In the past hour his troubled thought had crystallized into plans for action.

The constable's joking mood grated on him, but he made himself smile at Goff. "Looking for me, Dusty?"

"Inspector Haley wants to see you, Sarge. In his cabin. At your *ad libitum*, he said—whatever that means. I think he's got your furlough papers and your *chickamin* ready." The constable sobered a little. "Where're you spending your leave, Dave—back East? Been a long time since you've been home to see your folks."

"Thanks for rousting me," David said. "No, Dusty, it won't be back East, I'm afraid."

Goff looked at him, puzzled; then he hurried back to the Police quadrangle where he and another off-duty constable had been tossing turnips in the air and practicing dry-shooting with their revolvers.

For a moment longer David stood looking at the Great Divide. Yes, it had been a long time, a long and pleasureless time, since he had seen the Eastern cities. It seemed endless years that he'd been watching over Indian bands, shepherding homesteaders, keeping track of prospectors and trappers, and being the long arm of the law in that frontier country. He had wanted desperately to get home that summer, before it was too late; to see his mother and dad once again. But this other business came first. It came ahead of anything else on earth.

As he started for Inspector Haley's cabin, he came upon a middle-aged Blood Indian squatting on his heels at the side door of the barracks. It was Itai-Po, the Moon-Shadow, whom the Police detachment had been using as a scout for patrols into the mountain fastnesses to the west.

Clad in breechclout and moccasins, Itai-Po was no reservation "Smoky" but thoroughly an Indian. For weapons he carried only a knife and a short ram's-horn bow, wound with a rattlesnake skin. The blanket across his shoulders was a Stikine River *narhkin*, woven of big-horn wool and decorated with the Snake and Magic Crane of the North Fox totem.

As the Indian rose up facing him, David said, "You

remember yesterday I said you'n me might pitch off together again? On a *hiyu* big scout this time."

Itai-Po's black eyes lit up with the adventure of spruce-shadow trails and man-hunting with the lean, quiet sergeant.

David went on, "Good. This evening we pitch off. We leave *hyas* quick—in half a pipe. You ready, huh?"

"I been wait," Itai-Po answered. "Where go, mebbe? Peace River? Sikanni River? What work, mebbe? Patrol?"

David jerked his thumb to the northwest. "We go there. No patrol. We go *stoh lepee neiska*—on our own hook. You wait here two-three minutes for me, Itai-Po."

He went on to Inspector Haley's cabin, knocked, and went in. The officer, elbow-deep in paper work at his desk, answered David's salute and reached for two envelopes.

"Here's your furlough, Kirke," he said, holding out the larger envelope. "And here"—the smaller envelope, with the dull jingle of gold coins—"is your means of enjoying it. I sincerely hope you have the fine, refreshing leave you deserve."

David folded the furlough papers carefully into his money-belt and dropped the gold coins into his pocket. "This leave," he remarked, "is only for a month, sir—"

Inspector Haley looked at him blankly. "*Only?*" he echoed. "Why, Division Headquarters issued an order that no officer or man is to get more than two weeks, Kirke. I nearly perjured myself to get on 'only a month.' I felt you've been working too hard. You've done two terms out here on the Plains without one free day."

"I'm grateful to you, sir," David said. "And ordinarily

I'd be ashamed to ask for still more time, but I simply can't get back here by the fifth of September."

"Why not?"

David looked out the window. "I'd just as soon not say, now. It might seem like a wild-goose chase."

"But you're visiting your home in the East, aren't you?"

"I've given that up."

Haley looked at him narrowly. "Are you sure you can't tell me where you're going and what you'll be doing? If not as your superior officer, then as your friend. You know how serious the penalties are for overstay."

David slowly nodded. "I know. I'll take what comes."

Haley thrummed on the desk a moment. "Well, I'll do what I can for you. If you simply can't get back by the fifth of September, and any question comes up, I'll state that you're on a secret patrol to the Okanagan."

David shook his head. "That's mighty fine of you, sir, but I won't let you risk a marred record for my sake."

"That's my concern. There's just one thing I'm asking of you—to get back here and wipe the McPherson killing off our slate before winter sets in. Headquarters has been riding me to get that murder cleaned up. The case has been all yours so far, so you're the one to finish it off."

"What if it can never be finished?" David asked quietly.

Haley cleared his throat uneasily. "Kirke, I want to ask you a frank question. Do you think Esther Shannon and her brother had any connection with the mur-

der? I know that you—uh, saw Esther Shannon pretty steady this summer. You are better acquainted at their place than anybody else, so your opinion ought to be authentic.”

“Esther and Paul were given a jury trial and acquitted for lack of proof, weren’t they, sir?”

“That trial,” Haley said impatiently, “didn’t prove anything. The court had no facts except what you presented, and that’s why I want your own personal opinion. Do you think—yes or no—that the Shannons had some connection with this murder?”

“No! The very idea is absurd.”

“Then why under heaven did you recommend that they be arrested and given a public trial? They told a flimsy story, I know, and the evidence against them was strong, but—why that trial?”

“That’s hard to answer, sir,” Kirke said slowly. In the days since the trial, he himself had more than once doubted if he had done the right thing. It was no clear-cut issue one way or the other. But always he had come back doggedly to the conviction that he had acted wisely.

Haley went on, “It’s true that the Shannons were acquitted, Kirke, but you dragged them into that trial and you ought to feel responsible for getting back here as soon as possible and finding the killer. Acquittal or no, they’ll be under a cloud until you do. Will you have a mailing address where I can reach you if anything new comes to light?”

David smiled a little grimly. “A mailing address, where I’m going—hardly!” He noticed Haley’s puzzled frown and added, “I’m not hiding anything willfully,

sir. The truth is, I don't know myself where this business will take me, or what I'll be doing."

"*Hmmph!* Well, can I help you in any way? Extra money? Personal backing?"

David turned to leave. "You might keep an eye on the Shannons, sir. Paul isn't strong, you know, and Esther—well, she just doesn't belong in a raw country like this."

"I'll watch out for them both," Haley promised. He reached out his hand. "Good luck and Godspeed—wherever you're going."

David shook hands, saluted, then turned and walked out of the cabin.

A few steps from the door Itai-Po was waiting for him.

"You got our canoe ready, Itai-Po?" David asked.

The Blood pointed to a clump of whitewoods along the bank of Bear River, a quarter mile west of the post. "Canoe tied up there. My light birchrind."

"Good. How about your camping outfit?"

The Indian tapped a small pack he carried which was not much larger than a folded blanket. "*Hiyu* many portages," he explained. He pointed at a long-tailed magpie that was flying over the barracks and having an awkward time in the evening breeze. "Fool bird carry heap big tail and go *flap-flap*; hummer bird tote little tail and go *zip*."

David smiled. "Right. Now listen, Itai-Po. You go put canoe to water and paddle up Bear River to landing at Shannon place. I go there by horse. We meet there at dusk and pitch off. You *kumtux*?"

Itai-Po nodded and started toward the whitewoods.

David went into the barracks and crossed to the boarded-off corner that was his room.

His preparations were brief. He took off his uniform, laid it away in the locker, and put on civilian khaki. Into his pack went a light fishing outfit, a few articles of clothing, two pairs of moccasins, his Service binoculars, extra ammunition for his belt-gun and Enfield rifle, and two tight-woven blankets to wrap it all in.

Dusty Goff sauntered in and stood watching. "Not wasting any time getting away, I see, Dave. Where are you heading? Looks like a bush trip of some sort."

"Might be," David evaded.

"If it wasn't that I ain't seen you spending any evenings at the Shannon place lately, I'd guess you might be pitching off on your honeymoon."

The remark cut David like a knife. But he said nothing, and went on with his preparations. From his locker he took a battered felt hat and a patched old corduroy coat, and stowed them carefully in his pack.

"Snakes," Goff remarked, "them ain't no duds for a honeymoon, if you *are* off on a honeymoon. But with quiet fellers like yourself, you never cain tell what they're up to. The hours you used to keep when you went off to the Shannon place was something scandalous—"

David whirled around, an angry order on his lips. But he managed to fight it back. "Dusty," he said quietly, "go out and saddle a horse for me, will you? I'll be riding for a few miles on this trip. Then I'll send the horse back. Keep an eye out for it after supper."

"Surelee will, if you say so," Dusty agreed. "But you know it brings bad luck to send your horse home with

the saddle on. When that happens, the Crees say, it means you won't ever come back from that trip."

"That's not the worst thing I can imagine," Kirke said cryptically. "No, not the worst . . ."

2

In the first hush of evening, David left the Police post on the chestnut gelding that Dusty had saddled for him, and headed northwest over the park-prairie country, cutting across a bend of the Bear River. The region was at the far northern wash of the homesteader wave, and it looked as lone and deserted as when it had been a battleground between the Bloods and Assiniboinis, not so many years ago. Three miles from the post he rode past a small nester place in a creek bottom—the only settler sign in his hour's ride.

Four miles beyond the nester place he struck the bank of the Bear River, just below the great bend where the stream swung abruptly west and headed straight for the distant foothill wilderness. Through the river-bank whitewoods and birches he rode out into a small clearing where a gravel creek flowed into the Bear.

In the middle of the clearing stood a rambling, split-log building of several rooms, with a small, empty stable at the woods edge, a fur-cache dugout, a spring house, and canoe landing. Built by Esther Shannon's uncle in the year when David had first come to this region, the place had been intended as trading post and overnight lodging for trappers, homesteaders, and prospectors. But the homesteader wave had failed to come, travelers were few, and the tiny post had never panned out.

The twilight river, the creeping prairie roses around the clearing, the piny tang drifting down from the low hills up the creek brought David poignant memories of the evenings he had gone walking in the whippoorwill dusk with Esther Shannon. He hated to think of the long weeks when he would be away and she would be by herself there. The spot was lonely for human habitation. Lonely, wild, and isolated.

He took his rifle from the saddle bucket, lifted off his pack, and turned the horse around. At his sharp command to "home," the Police mount started back toward the post at a brisk canter. Leaving his rifle and pack near the canoe landing, David walked up the path toward the split-log building.

In the small garden near the spring house Esther Shannon was gathering an apronful of peas for the evening meal. As David drew near, she heard him coming, turned, and he was face to face with her, for the first time since the murder trial at Bear River Settlement.

A graceful, medium-tall girl of twenty-three, with soft brown hair and warm-brown eyes, Esther Shannon had come from the East, like David, and the East still clung to her. It was always a marvel to him that this girl should be living in that raw, pioneer region. Her parents, homesteaders in the Moose Jaw district, had died in a prairie blizzard; and she had been thrown entirely on her own, with a younger brother to look after. For two years she had taught at a Mission school in Saskatchewan, then at the half-breed school at Bear River Settlement. On the death of her uncle, who had homesteaded this tract along the Bear River and staked

a float-gold claim up the tributary creek, she had come here to live out the two remaining years of the fief and nurse her brother Paul back to health.

It had been a bad mistake. The gold claim had proved to be worth little; the expected settler tide had kept far to the south; the life here had been dreadfully lonesome and bleak for her. In his quiet way, David had tried to watch over the Shannon place and buoy her up through the bad times. But then, as the last and worst of all her troubles, the McPherson incident—

As David confronted her now, he was shocked at the deep weariness on her sweet young face. Uncertain how she would receive him, he touched his hat and said awkwardly, "I meant to call around sooner, Esther, but I had extra work to clean up before my furlough."

She did not answer. David noticed the coldness in her manner. She was looking at him as though he were a stranger. Or worse—an enemy.

He picked up the wooden pail of vegetables she had gathered and said, "I'll carry it for you," and they went along the gravel path to the kitchen door. Esther stopped there, not inviting him inside. David set the pail just over the threshold and stood fumbling his hat.

"I'm going away on furlough, Esther," he finally blurted out. "For several weeks. I came past to say goodbye—and to see you." Then he remembered her book that he had, and took it out of his jacket pocket. "And to return this, too."

Still, Esther said nothing. In the silence he heard her brother Paul down on the creek-bank trail, evidently coming home.

He tried again to probe into what she was thinking and feeling toward him. "When I get back—sometime in September—would you lend me that book again, Esther? I thought to finish it this afternoon, but—"

She interrupted him. "If you really want to finish the book, Sergeant Kirke, you'd better keep it now. I won't need it any more."

David was jarred by her words. As plain as daylight, she was saying that she did not intend ever to let him see her again.

He scuffed at the gravel with his boot and plunged into the subject that lay between them. "Lord knows you've reason to be bitter about that trial, Esther. But I was hoping you'd withhold judgment till I could talk with you and explain—"

Again she cut him short. "I think that the trial spoke for itself, Sergeant Kirke. Nothing that can be said now would recall one word or one moment of that dreadful experience. I wish you wouldn't bring the subject up again."

"But don't you see, Esther, that I acted under compulsion? I had reasons for causing the arrest and the trial."

Esther tossed her head angrily. "Of course you had. Good reasons, to your way of thinking. When some silly clue pointed to this place, you felt it was your duty to follow that clue. You'd been welcomed here as a friend, and because of that, you were able to unearth other alleged evidence against us. That also, I suppose, was your duty. And then, as an officer of the law, you were simply compelled to drag us into the glare and shame of a trial for murder!"

"That open trial, Esther, was safer than to let rumor and dangerous talk go on till it got out of hand. You and Paul were suspected by everyone in this district—"

"Including yourself!" Esther interrupted, her low tones passionate with anger. "Otherwise, you'd have had the courage to stand between us and arrest. And you probably still have your suspicions. And now you're going away on a pleasure trip—now, of all times!—leaving Paul and me to bear this odium."

Under her bitter indictment, David stood silent and miserable, realizing the hopelessness of any explanation. Yet he felt that no man could let charges like hers go unchallenged.

"Whether you believe me or not, Esther," he said, "I did *not* use my welcome here to spy on you and Paul. You mustn't say things like that—things which can never be unsaid."

Instead of answering him, Esther turned and went into the cabin, closing the door in his face.

As David slowly turned away and went down the path, he met Paul Shannon coming up from the creek trail.

The nesters and half-breeds thereabouts pitied Paul Shannon because he was a "lunger," but their pity was mixed with contempt—a young man of twenty who could not chop down a tree or ride a bronc or hold a plow in the prairie sod. But Kirke had early realized that Paul Shannon had been born for other things. There were times when he felt a little in awe of the lad's dreaming, visionary nature. And he knew that Esther too understood the quality of genius in her young,

stricken brother, and this had made her fight for him all the fiercer.

David noticed the boy's muddied trousers. "You've been tom-rocking up on that claim, Paul," he said. "That's too hard for you. Didn't you and I have a private agreement that when you needed a bit of money to tide you over, you'd let me lend it to you?"

"I didn't think an hour or two at the claim would hurt any," Paul said, in his dreamy way. He put down his shovel and mattock as a spell of coughing came on, and leaned weakly against a sapling. "But I guess—it did—hurt, David."

David put a steadying hand on the boy's shoulder. "Paul," he said, when the worst of the coughing was over, "I'm going away for a few weeks, and while I'm gone I'll want to know that you're not tom-rocking, or doing any other work you shouldn't. Here"—he reached into his pocket for the gold coins of his furlough pay and put them into Paul's hand—"this'll tide you over. Just don't let on about it to Esther, for heaven's sake. She doesn't understand about that trial. I hope you do."

"I knew you were trying somehow to be our friend," Paul said. "It was like walking through a dark woods at night, with you guiding us and fighting off dangers." He looked at the gold in his hand and slowly shook his head. "But I can't accept this, David. No, I can't."

"Why not? It's just a loan. You've taken other little loans from me."

"That was when I felt sure I could pay you back."

David thought that the boy was losing his courage and giving up his dogged fight for life. "Nonsense,

Paul!" he argued. "You're starting to pick up. After a winter here in these pine hills, you'll be hard as nails. You mustn't be discouraged. That's letting Esther down. Of course you'll pay me back."

"It's not that I'm discouraged," Paul explained. "It's that—well, we won't be here, David."

"What?"

"We're leaving," Paul added. "Esther has started to pack already. We're going back East. It's too hard a fight to hang on till the land becomes ours."

It seemed to David that all his plans came crashing about his ears. A little dazed, he stood there fighting to think; fighting down a rebellion against the role he had been forced to play and the raw injustice to himself. What was the use, he asked, of going ahead with the long, dangerous trip he had planned? When he got back, Esther would be half a continent away.

Out of the deepening twilight he saw Itai-Po's slender birchbark come gliding silently in toward the canoe landing. The sight of it reminded him again of his plans, his duty, and his long, spruce-shadows trail ahead. He shook Paul's hand and said goodbye, and went out the path for his pack and rifle.

At the landing he stepped into the canoe and shoved it off. They swung out into the current and headed west, toward the foothills and the mountains on beyond.

3

The days that followed were long and each alike. Dawn broke at three in the morning, and at ten at night there was still paddling light on the bosom of lake or

river. At the earliest gray of morning, when the solitaire was singing his "*Leve! Leve!* Come alive," David was out of his blankets and whipping a pool for trout. By the time he returned with four or five, Itai-Po would have his cone of fire built and camp ready to be broken. In twenty minutes they were through with breakfast, into the canoe and gone.

Every two hours they stopped for a pipe, and three times during the long day for a mug-up. They carried no food, but relied on fish, berries, waterfowl, and occasionally a black-tailed deer or woodland caribou at a lake edge. At each camp Itai-Po produced a gum pot and smeared cracks in his birchbark.

The foothills themselves ran through cycles that were as regular as the days. First it was silent river, winding through forests of columnar spruce; then a river-widening or valley lake, aflutter with teal, ducks, geese, and the sonorous trumpeter swan; then a gushing, white-water creek at the upper end, leading to a tiny watershed over some hill range; then portage, white-water creek, lake, and the spruce-buried river again.

The two of them had silence in common, and they passed hours without so much as grunting at each other. Itai-Po's expertness at canoe work and David's strength and white-man stamina made a unique water-dogging combination. Their swift pace was a reassurance to David, whose furlough days were precious, and it brought a keen satisfaction to the wilderness-loping Itai-Po. Their "pipes," the Blood said, were the longest he had ever known in canoe travel. When they covered in two days a distance which the swiftest Assiniboin

runner had never covered in less than three, Itai-Po's swarthy face cracked in a derisive grin at besting the ancient enemies of his tribe.

For the sake of speed they were constantly taking white-water *sautes* which looked like suicide and scudding straight across wind-swept lakes instead of following the shore line. They poled up rapids, towed through gorges, and short-cut over the padded trails of moose and bear.

When Bear River shallowed into a foothill brook, they portaged through six heartbreaking miles of new windfall to the nearest canoe water, and sped on, range after range, till they dropped down into the broad valley of Mountain River, a snow-fed stream that wound between the foothills and the Rockies.

So far, they had followed the centuries-old trade route between the Coastal Siwash and the Indians of the Great Plains; but at Mountain River the route bent south a hundred miles to an easy pass across the Great Divide.

"Too slow, that trade route; we waste days," David said. On a sand bar he sketched a map and indicated a point on the far side of the Divide. "We want to go there, Itai-Po. You get us there quickest quick can."

For half an hour the Indian squatted on his heels and studied the map. Finally he said, "No man ever go straight through. But *we* go straight through. It five sleeps quicker than follow trade path."

That evening they laid their canoe away in a cave, and the next morning they lifted their packs and began the climb up the eastern slope of the Divide.

For nearly half the distance there they followed an

old moccasin trail which the Chilcoots had used on their raids against the Blackfeet. It took them steadily higher and higher, with few dips into the canyons. The trail dimmed to nothingness, but Itai-Po pushed boldly ahead, with a surety that amazed David. They made lean-tos of limber-pine branches at night, and put moss into their moccasins against the jagged stones and increasing cold; and David kept his rifle free to guard against the huge, lumbering silvertips.

They climbed out of the hardwoods into the big conifers, where the gray crow was at home; out of these into the storm-gnarled tamarack and ground pines; then up, across the heather terraces, which were vivid splashes of red and yellow flowers, with innumerable butterflies playing over the heather. Above these terraces they came abruptly into the high snowlands, where the wind was keen as a whiplash; where they walked through clouds and watched storms sweeping through the valleys a mile below them.

Finally they came to a level boulder field, half a mile across, with an acre-sized lake of steel-gray water in the middle of it. A small brook flowed out of the lake toward the east, and on the other side a brook flowed toward the west, and they knew they were standing on the Great Divide itself. It was a wild, elemental scene, with white ptarmigan chortling among the boulders, and the plaintive whistle of Picas drifting to them ventriloquially. In every direction they looked out across an immense sweep of ranges, *neves*, and endless miles of evergreen forestry.

As they dropped down the west slope, they seemed to be entering a different country altogether—a warm,

moist, luxuriant land. Different songsters flitted in the bushes, the trout had different markings, the stag fern and maidenhair were strange and exotic. The winds no longer carried the chill of the Mackenzie Barrens, but were mild, soft Chinooks, charged with the moist warmth of the Kuro Siwo.

It was David's first trip into the country of the Western slope, and his days were filled with new experiences. The weather seemed perpetually on the verge of rain, and a cloud as big as a thumbnail would bring a heavy shower. Just below timberline they ran into slender spruce no bigger around than a saucer, but which reached up a hundred and fifty feet. From a cave shelter, where a storm drove them, they saw stances of these spruces whipping in the gale like fields of tall grain. As they dropped down and down, they passed through timber belts where the trees towered two hundred and fifty feet high. Still lower, they came to giant cedar and yellow spruce which made saplings of the timber above.

At the first sizable creek they struck, they saw a grizzly scooping out salmon that were spent and bruised raw by their long run from the Pacific.

"He fool, that bear," Itai-Po remarked. "Scoop out too many fish. Watch 'em flip-flop; grin. Plenty fish bring fish hawks circling. Fish hawks bring Indian. Indian shoot bear. Ha!"

"Bears and men too," David observed. "Prospector tom-rocks gold. *Hiyu* gold. Throws hat in air. Yells 'Hi-yippety yip!' Bush-sneak hears. Bellies up close. Shoots man."

Itai-Po looked at him. "Mebbe prospector—this McPherson man, huh?"

David shrugged. "Mebbe so. Mebbe no. We wait-see."

They followed down the headwaters creek to a small river. There the Blood struck a fresh moccasin trail, backtracked it, and found a canoe cached under some riverbank ferns. After setting the canoe to water, he tied some knots in a strip of *babische* and put the string on a flat rock, along with a fine hunting knife and a pound of trade tobacco.

"Canoe belong Caribou Indian," he explained to David. "String knots tell him we took canoe. Pay him with knife and tobac'. You *kumtux*?"

They placed a hollow rock in the canoe prow, laid in some live coals and put damp moss on these, to make a smudge and keep the mosquito clouds away. Then they shoved off, down the unknown western river.

Forty miles downstream they came to a triple fork and here struck the old trade trail which they had followed through the foothills. Turning north on the trail, they pushed ahead all one day and night and the next day; and that evening, just fourteen days from the time they had left the Mounted post, they came to their journey's end—the point which Kirke had indicated on his sand-bar map across the mountain.

At the mouth of a little creek, whose silty water whispered of gold alluvium upstream, a larch tree had been stripped of its branches and at the top of this lobstick an old shirt fluttered conspicuously. It was a lonely prospector's way of drawing the attention of any

travelers and making sure they would not go by without visiting him.

David motioned at the lobstick. "Here we find prospector called Sock-Eye Sullivan, Itai-Po. Here we find out if our trip is fool chase or not."

4

At Sullivan's diggings, a hundred yards up the creek, they lifted out their canoe and David looked around at the prospector's camp in the little birch glen. It was a typical sourdough's place, with only the raw necessities of a wilderness existence: a lopsided tent, a clothesline strung between two trees, ore specimens tossed here and there, a litter of broken tools, a home-made stone stove under the flap-front of the tent, a pet marmot that scurried under a log at the sight of strangers, and a freshly killed deer hanging in a bent-over birch.

At the diggings just up the creek, a burly, red-whiskered man was tom-rocking away, talking to himself as he worked. Presently he paused to rest, looked around and saw the two visitors. The shovel dropped from his hands and he came splashing down to greet them.

"Gosh a'mighty!" he spluttered, drop-jawed in surprise. "Comp'ny! Sock-Eye Sullivan, you're a born lucky malemute! Hello, strangers! Where might you be a-goin', and who might you— Why, I'm a pigeon-toed coyote if it ain't Davy Kirke! Davy, you ornery dog, is't really you or just your spook? What the blazes are you a-doin' 'way over here acrost the Rockies from where you belong? My blessed eyes—hand me your front hoof, Davy, for an honest-to-goodness shake."

His joy was pathetic. He shook hands with both of them several times over and then set about rustling up a meal, all the while keeping up a spate of talk.

"You got any t'baccy, son? I'm run out. And what time of the year is't, anyway?"

"Yes, I'll give you a couple pounds of tobacco. As for the date, this is the eighteenth."

"August, I s'pose?"

"Yes," David replied, himself amazed.

Over their early supper he eased the talk around to the matter which had brought him across the mountains. "Still trying to find that mother lode, are you, Sock-Eye? This makes your fourth year. You didn't come across to Bear River post for supplies this summer, and I took a long chance on your still being here. You must have stuck close this season."

Sullivan nodded to the last question. "Mighty close. Didn't leave at all. No, I ain't found the lode yet, but the tom-rockin' here is purty rich."

"I suppose you have company often?"

"Comp'ny!" Sullivan snorted. "They ain't half a dozen people in two hundred miles. I seen one pusson in three months, I have."

"Who was he?" David asked casually.

"'Nother sourdough. He struck a durn nice lode over in this country last spring. Was goin' out, he was, and get help. He hit acrost the mountains from here."

"So he'd struck it, had he? What made him tell you about that?"

"Why, us prospectors don't keep mum to each other about our strikes. It's the hatchet-and-pencil gentry

that we don't dass allow to get wind of any good lode or placer we find. In gold country they's always bush-sneaks around that 'ud ax a man for a goose quill of dust."

"Why didn't this sourdough drop down west to Siwash Fork, instead of crossing the mountains?"

"Wull, he was a-carryin' a nice poke out, and the Siwash Fork route has got a bad name. He was by hisself, and he didn't have no weapons 'cept a grouse gun."

Very casually David asked, "You didn't know him, did you, Sock-Eye? What was his name?"

"I knowed him well, Davy. He and me worked right alongside each other once, on a pair of fractions down in Kootenay. Sort of a foot-loose, homeless feller, he was. Rough-lookin', but gentle as they come. Some people they call him 'Sumdum' and others they call him 'Red.' His last name it was McPherson."

David jerked a little. But he refused to jump to conclusions.

"What sort of a man was this McPherson, Sock-Eye?" he asked. "Can you describe him for me?"

"Wull, he was big and bony, and about forty year old. Harmless sort of pusson, he was, like I said."

Still, David would not let himself take anything for granted. In the length and breadth of British Columbia there might well be a dozen big, bony McPhersons. The man whom Sock-Eye had known and the man who'd been murdered at the Shannon place across the Rockies might not be the same person at all.

He reached into his pack and pulled out the old felt

hat and corduroy coat which he had brought along. "Take a look at these, Sock-Eye. Do they mean anything to you?"

Sullivan looked at the clothes, blinked his eyes, and swore. "Why, them's the identical duds that Sumdum was a-wearin'."

Itai-Po grunted. Slowly David put the hat and coat back into his pack. Sock-Eye looked from one to the other, puzzled and frowning.

"What's up, Davy? What've you been pokin' all them questions at me for?"

David lit his pipe and said quietly, "McPherson was murdered, Sock-Eye. This summer. Across in my country. Just ten miles from the Mounted post."

Sullivan jumped to his feet excitedly. "You're lyin', Davy. You can't mean that. Sumdum McPherson dead—killed— Why, there wa'n't a dog that'd bite him, or a man alive that didn't take to him like a brother. I don't believe it!"

"But it's true, Sock-Eye," David said. "I tell you, McPherson was murdered. Those holes in his coat are bullet holes. He was shot in the back, along a riverbank, one Sunday, and his body was thrown into Bear River. The party that did it is somewhere on this green earth, and I'm out to get that party."

"I'd kill him barehanded, I would," Sullivan snarled.

"I had only two clues," David went on. "I learned his name from an old Telegraph Creek grub list in his hatband; and I found a gun near where he was shot—the weapon that was used to kill him. I myself had given that gun to a family there on Bear River,

the Shannons. They're *cheechakos*, from the East; Esther Shannon and her younger brother.

"They told me that McPherson had spent the night, his last night on earth, at their place. They also told me that they had in their possession McPherson's eight thousand dollars in dust and nuggets. They said McPherson had left the gold with them because he felt he was being followed; and also that he had borrowed their rifle for that same reason. They said they hadn't heard of his getting shot, or they would have reported at once about the gold."

"Sounds like a flimsy yarn to me," Sullivan interrupted. "A'mighty flimsy, I'd say."

David nodded. "That's how people over there thought. When young Paul Shannon innocently gave it away about their having the gold, the rumors began flying, and tempers started to get ugly. So I recommended that the Shannons be arrested and given trial. The evidence for a murder case was not sufficient, and they were acquitted."

"I'd have hung 'em!" Sock-Eye asserted flatly.

David said nothing to that. Across his mind jiggled the bitter memory of Esther Shannon closing the door in his face; and the anguishing thought that they would be gone, she and Paul, before he could possibly get back from this wilderness trip.

"Let's suppose," he went on, "that the Shannons told the truth. Then somebody else killed McPherson. For what? A grudge? He didn't look to me like a man who would make enemies. For his gold? I didn't quite believe so. A simple robbery, without the danger and hul-

labaloo of a murder, would have been more credible. So I asked myself, 'Exactly why was McPherson being shadowed and why was he killed?'

"His poke of gold gave me an idea. It wasn't flour gold or smooth nuggets. It was rough nuggets—which meant that it hadn't been washed along very far from the mother lode. It might well be lode gold itself. I reasoned that maybe McPherson had made a strike and had picked up what gold was handy, and then started out for help. According to what you've just told me, McPherson really did make a strike. So we're on solid ground so far.

"Now, let's do a little more supposing, Sock-Eye. Suppose you were McPherson, and you'd just made a good strike. What would you have done?"

"I'd have busted in to a land office and had it registered. Then I'd have got me three-four good partners and hotfooted it right back here."

David nodded. "That's what any sourdough would have done. But in country this wild, with so many creeks and canyons all looking alike, how would you make sure that you'd know the way back to your Discovery claim?"

"Why, I'd make me a map," Sock-Eye said. "I'd make me a birchbark map that'd take me right back to the—" He broke off, staring open-mouthed at David. Finally he burst out, "Why, Davy, that's it! That's why they killed Sumdum! He had a map. They didn't hanker for his poke so much; it was the map they wanted!"

"That's what I suspected. And when I examined his coat and saw where he'd sewed a secret pocket into the lining and somebody had ripped it open, I felt pretty

sure of my guess. Furthermore, this would account for their killing him. You see, they couldn't take over the Discovery unless he was safely out of the way."

"That's abs'lutely so. But how did you know that Sumdum made his strike over in these parts?"

"Some more figuring," David said. "There's very little nugget gold on the east side of the Rockies, and besides, McPherson was a stranger over there. I reasoned that he'd come from somewhere across the Divide, on the old trade trail, thinking it was safer than the Siwash Fork route. So I decided to come over here with Itai-Po and look around. I counted heavy on you being acquainted with him. And you were!"

Sock-Eye helped himself to more of David's tobacco. "You figger this was a one-man job?"

"No. Certain features about it make me believe it was two or three men. I also believe they came back over here and are working that lode now."

Sock-Eye pushed his hat back and scratched at his tousled hair. "But dang it, Davy, I don't know where Sumdum's strike is at. He didn't tell me and I didn't want him to. All I know is it was somewhere up in the Left-Over."

"Where and what is that?" David asked.

Sock-Eye jerked a thumb to the north. "It's a country up yon; a jumble of rivers and hills and every whichnot, between two big ranges. Somebody said that when the Lord got finished creatin' the earth, He hadda lot of cricks and broken mountains and wild timber left over, so He just chucked it all into that region to get shut of it, and that's why it's called the Left-Over."

"How does a person get there?"

"You just follow up this river and over the watershed, and you drop down into it. But if you're thinkin' of ferretin' out them killers in that country—" He shook his head sadly. "You'd not have a Chinyman's chance, Davy. It's the dangedest mullock of cricks, canyons, moraines, mountains, deep woods, windfall, and rocks you ever saw. Not even the Goat-Eater Ind'uns go in there. A needle in a haystack 'ud be easy huntin' compared with findin' the party as killed Sumdum."

David thought unpleasantly of how swiftly his furlough was draining away, but he said doggedly, "Itai-Po and I'll find those killers. We've got to, if it takes all winter."

"'Nother thing," Sock-Eye added. "They's something wrong with that country up yon. Fellows that go into the Left-Over come out shakin' hands with the willows. The Left-Over breaks 'em. Sumdum was a bush-loper all his life and he wasn't in there long, but he was half batty when he got out to here. Me, I wouldn't go in there for all the gold you could shake a stick at. People say it's full of h'ants and queer doin's . . ."

5

Two full weeks later David made a lonely camp one night at a fork where two canyons led back into the eastern mountains. He cooked supper for two, then sat down to wait.

Itai-Po should have returned to the rendezvous. He had gone up the north canyon two days before, to clean up a maze of creeks leading out of a big moraine. David had taken the south canyon and ferreted it out to his complete satisfaction—and disappointment.

The two weeks had passed without yielding one sign of any recent party in the Left-Over. Working northwest up the trunk river, David and the Blood scout had turned into every branch stream and followed them back to the first portage, where a party would have left signs for Itai-Po to read. But they had found nothing.

They had paddled from twilight to twilight, with only two or three hours of sleep at night. They had chopped their way through the piled-up, tangled wind-fall of centuries, and fought whitewaters, and felt seeping into them the loneliness and nameless fears of a country wilder and more elemental than anything they had ever imagined.

Again and again in the lonely hours of those weeks, David had thought of the bitter charges that Esther had flung at him. When he had planned this long wilderness trip, it had been with the hope that he would return with evidence which would completely free her and Paul from suspicion, and that she would then understand about the trial. But now he could have no hope of any such end to the trip. She would be gone. All that would remain would be the barren satisfaction of clearing up the murder of Sumdum McPherson. And even that was beginning to look like a fool's hope.

Itai-Po did not return at dark. In an hour the moon rose, and still no Itai-Po. David ate a solitary supper and sat beside the fire, smoking. Sometime after midnight a shadow glided out of the canyon silently, and Itai-Po crouched down across the dying fire.

David looked sharply at the Indian's swarthy face, and his heart leaped. "*You've found 'em!*"

Itai-Po nodded. "Struck trail at dusktime. Didn't follow to camp. We find that tomorrow. Easy. Tonight—sleep."

At dawn they hid their canoe, smoothed out all signs of their camp, and hurried up the north canyon to Itai-Po's first "find." It was a shoe track, so faint and rain-obliterated that David himself would never have noticed it. At a swift pace the Indian led him on up the canyon, pointing casually to signs where David saw nothing.

Four miles above the forks the canyon opened out into a dark, oval valley, five miles long and a half-mile wide. They went cautiously now, knowing that the camp was close. A mile farther on, Itai-Po stopped suddenly, with a warning gesture.

Through the buckbrush David caught a glimmer of white, the dirty-white of a canvas tent. He started forward to get a better look, but Itai-Po clutched his arm.

"Mole-eye! Look!" he ejaculated in his own tongue. "A papoose could see a trap so clumsy!"

Two juniper bushes leaned almost together across the path. Between them a green cord was stretched, so that an unwary intruder would run into and break it. Cautiously Kirke and Itai-Po followed the string. It led over a rock ledge. They looked over, and then at each other.

"Huh!" the Blood snorted. "Warning! You run into string, rattle-pan drop on rock, make *hiyu* noise, warn 'em!"

"That settles another thing," David thought to himself. "No decent prospector wants to be warned *against* company. He hangs out his shirt so that folk won't miss

him. That green cord means we're at the end of our trail!"

They crept away from the path and bellied through the undergrowth toward the camp. It was new-found, on a little spot thirty steps above the stream. The tent was large—a three-man affair. No one was about, but on up the valley they heard the ring of pickax against rock.

"We go see," Kirke directed.

They backed off, circled, and from a jumble of boulders and juniper, looked down upon the diggings. The Discovery was a quartz vein at the foot of an eroded bank, which showed ten feet of gray gravel on top, then a stratum of serpentine rock, then a layer of black rock which carried the quartz. The gravel bar in the stream-bed was rich with free gold that had trickled out, but an eighteen-foot tunnel had been thrust into the hill-side to follow the richer quartz vein.

Three men were working in and about the tunnel. Through his Service glasses David scrutinized them closely.

One of the trio was a *métis*, an Assiniboin half-breed. While he worked, he kept glancing sharply into the timber and rock tangles all around. His movements were furtive and sinuous, like those of a woods animal. The other two men were whites. One of them, rather small, with spindly legs and long arms, had features that suggested Chinese blood. The third was a big, bushy-whiskered man somewhat resembling Sock-Eye Sullivan—except that Sock-Eye's honesty and simple human kindness were no part of his make-up.

All three were strangers to David. He handed the glasses to Itai-Po, and said, "D'you know 'em?"

The Indian studied the three a little while, then lowered the binoculars. "'Un't know two whites," he said. "But the *métis*, him Charlo Daoust. People say he once kill man over at McMurray Landing. He woods-loper, sharp as mountain cat. Twig broken, leaf upset, he see."

David nodded. The make-up of the party was clear enough. The whites were city outcasts; the 'breed was their reliance in the wilderness. His cunning was the reason no signs had been left on the trunk-river portages.

"Look, Itai-Po," he cautioned, "this bush-wise Charlo Daoust, he mebbe find out somebody's around. That bad danger. You're bush-wise too. You got to keep him from finding out. Got to show that a Blood is a better bush-shadow than an Assiniboin 'breed. You *kumtux*?"

Itai-Po nodded to the challenge.

David went on, "You and me see green cord. We know what that means. We know these men guilty. But white-man's court don't know. Court won't take our yes-word. You *kumtux* what court-sure evidence means? Good. We got to get court-sure evidence. Then we arrest. Not before."

Itai-Po chewed thoughtfully on a birch twig. "How get this court-sure evidence?"

It was a question easier asked than answered.

That afternoon, while Itai-Po lay watching the three men at the lode, David slipped into their camp and gave it a thorough searching. He found no map, no writ-

ing, no clues of any sort. He knew then that they had carefully destroyed every bit of evidence connecting them with their crime. They had surely burned McPherson's map and made one of their own, leaving nothing whatever to link them with that brutal killing across the mountains last summer.

That evening, while the three were eating supper at their camp, Itai-Po slipped up to within a dozen steps and listened to their talk. It was David's hope that they would talk about McPherson and betray themselves out of their own mouths. But evidently that subject was taboo. When Itai-Po came back at the end of an hour, he reported that they had not once mentioned the killing or the prospector.

In a side canyon that evening, at the cave camp which he and Itai-Po had established, David sat up most of the night, a dead pipe in his teeth, trying to plan how he could get sure evidence against three killers who had left *no* evidence. He had run them down; he knew within himself that they had murdered Sumdum McPherson for this rich lode they were working; but bringing them to justice and clearing the Shannon name—that was something else again.

As he sat there, the appalling loneliness and savagery of the Left-Over weighed on him. The eerie wail of wind through the rock fissures and the black spruce tops, the play of moon-shadows on the needle-carpeted moss, the distant, ghostly cries of night animals—all these made him understand why the Left-Over had so frightening a name. Could he somehow make use of the uncanny spirit of that wild, lonely valley? he won-

dered. Could he somehow use it to strike terror into the hearts of men whose consciences were already burdened with a murder?

6

One morning Murph Mecklin straightened up from his work and leaned for a moment on his pick handle. He looked at Chink Greever and Charlo Daoust, who were shoveling behind him. He looked at the leaden sky and held out his hand to feel for rain.

On the north slope something cracked sharply. Mecklin whirled around to look. As his glance went up the slope, his throat split in a yelp of warning. Daoust and Greever jerked upright and would have run for their rifles but Mecklin's frenzied gesture stopped them. They looked.

Down the north slope a ten-ton boulder came careening straight toward them, gathering speed and lesser boulders as it rolled. For a split-wink none of the three could stir. Daoust recovered first. With the agility of a big cat he sprang toward the tunnel mouth, out of the path of the boulder. Mecklin, with Greever on his heels, hurled himself into the buckbrush and went crashing through it like a panicky bull moose.

A few seconds afterwards, with a roar that shook the ground and filled the gorge with the dust of splintered rock, the boulder slide swept over the place where the three men had been working and piled up in the streambed below.

When the last trickle of gravel had subsided, the men approached the spot gingerly and eyed the destruction.

Mecklin shuddered and swore. "That was by the skin of our teeth, Greever. I heard a noise up there like a stick breakin' and looked up and there come that roll. If I hadn't heard that crack, we'd all be dead right now! Mashed flatter'n a bodewash chip!"

"Dry up!" Greever snapped. "You blow off too much. Let's find out what started that boulder rollin'. It was a balancer; I seen it up there several times, but it always looked solid enough to me."

They climbed up the slope to where the big boulder had "balanced" on a pedestal of slate. The immediate cause of its toppling was plain enough; it had been hit by a smaller rock, which had bounded down the slope in ten-foot jumps and broken into fragments at the impact. But what had started that smaller one?

"Likely a grizzly huntin' for mice," Meckin rasped. "Daoust, get busy and find his tracks, and we'll shoot him."

With Daoust leading, they tracked the smaller boulder up into a thicket of salmon berries, and found where it had lain. Daoust looked for signs through the thicket; he circled; he came back to the boulder site, dropped on hands and knees, and searched all around.

"Well," Greever demanded impatiently, "where's the grizzly's tracks? Let's trail him; we don't want a hunnert tons of boulders a-pilin' down on us ever' time a blasted bear gets hungry."

Daoust stood wide-legged, puzzled. "No bear signs. No bear. No signs a-tall. Nothing! I don't *kumtux*."

"Mebbe it just started rollin' natural," Mecklin concluded. "Let's get to work cleanin' away that rock mess."

We'd better cut a channel through it, or the crick'll back up into our tunnel and flood us out."

Dismissing the incident as just some freak happen-chance, they went back to the lode. But all that morning and afternoon their nerves were taut and jumpy over their hairbreadth escape.

That night, as they were going down the creek to camp, a footlog across a forty-foot chasm gave way just as Charlo Daoust, leading, stepped upon it. By a great leap backward he caught an overhanging bush and saved himself from an ugly fall down on the jagged, water-lashed rocks below.

"You built that footlog yourself," Greever snarled at the 'breed accusingly. "You ought to've done a safe job, 'stead of makin' a mantrap like that. If you'd broke your dirty neck, 'twould have served you right."

"I fix footlog good," the 'breed retorted angrily. "Good and strong. We use it two-three weeks now, and it didn't fall."

"Strong—blazes! Didn't you just see it break?"

A hot quarrel sprang up between the two. Mecklin finally stepped between them and ordered them to shut up.

"Mebbe these rains started the footlog slippin'," he suggested. "Let's get on to camp and eat. Mebbe that'll make us feel better."

In the dead quiet of one o'clock that night, with no rain falling or whisper of breeze blowing, a dead spruce snag thirty feet from their tent suddenly crashed full length to the ground, missing their tent by a scant eight feet. They sprang up, lit the lantern, and looked at the wreckage.

"Darned funny about that tree fallin' down on a still night like this," Mecklin remarked, his voice low and shaky. "Don't look natural-like to me. We've had high wind, and we've had rain, and we've had 'em both together, but that snag stood there solid as the brass gatepost of hades!"

Chink Greever jerked out, "We're hoodooed, that's what. They's a hoodoo a-workin' on us. Three times now—"

"Shut up that hoodoo stuff!" Mecklin cut him short. "That sort of talk'll give us all the willywams in mighty short order. This spruce a-fallin' down was just another accident. Go to bed, you big, whiskered baby. What're you shiverin' about? I thought you had guts!"

They crawled into their blankets again and tried to sleep.

When morning came and the gray shadows lifted from the spruces, the three ate breakfast and went up the gorge to their digging. As they cut a channel through the rock debris, one of them was on the lookout all the time, watching for they knew not what.

It happened late that afternoon. They had cut the channel through and gone back to the tunnel, to work inside of it. Just before twilight, when they were all three in the tunnel, Mecklin set a tiny powder blast under a stubborn rock. They backed up to the tunnel mouth and awaited the explosion nonchalantly—they had shot off a dozen similar charges.

It was Murph Mecklin again who yelled the warning, a second after the little charge went off. In the center of the tunnel, a staunch cedar upright, the key prop of their timbering, started skidding to one side at its

base. It stopped against a rock, but the roofing timber no longer had solid support. It gave way slowly, writhing like a tortured thing, and the tunnel began caving in. Mecklin leaped outside into the buckbrush, and, like a flash, Daoust dived after him. But Greever, whose brain was as slow as a turtle's, did not entirely escape; his legs and hips were caught by the falling gravel and he lay pinioned there, yelling and thrashing.

Mecklin pulled him out, and the three of them stood speechless, dazed, looking at the ruined tunnel. Mecklin finally found his tongue.

"If I hadn't seen that upright slippin', we'd be buried alive in that hole. Greever, if you'd left that prop like I fixed it in the first place, 'stead of tamperin'—"

"I didn't tamper!" Greever snarled. "I never touched it. I suppose I tampered with that boulder, heh? And that footlog. And that dead spruce, heh? Tamper, nothing—we're hoodooed on this job."

Mecklin no longer tried to bolster up his two confederates. He needed bolstering up himself.

As they walked back to camp, they kept close to one another, glancing into the underbrush around them and clutching at their belt-guns when shadows flickered under the dark spruces. A subtle dread was weaving itself around them. The "accidents," one after another, were driving them toward panic.

At camp that evening another blow fell, a blow which could not possibly be set down as accident but had to be interpreted as the work of some hand, whether ghostly or human.

Mecklin was cooking supper and Daoust was cleaning their tools. Greever had just gone into the tent to

stow away a couple of good-sized nuggets he had picked up at the lode. The two men outside heard him bellow suddenly, as if he had been struck a blow, and they leaped into the tent to see what had happened.

Frozen in his tracks, Greever stood holding the can in which they had put their dust and nuggets. "Look't!" he gasped hoarsely, thrusting the can at them. "Look't what our dust and nuggets have changed into."

Mecklin snatched the can from him and looked. Daoust looked—

The gold dust had changed to yellow sand, the nuggets to bits of heavy yellow gravel.

For an hour they sat in the darkness of their tent, rifles across their knees, and talked in whispers. It was Mecklin who first got hold of his jumping nerves and could think clearly. Gradually he managed to quiet Greever's panic and the half-breed's superstitious terror.

"Them accidents," he kept saying, "didn't just happen. They was staged. We ought to've seen that. Now this can business proves it. Somebody robbed us, the low-down carcajou. They's somebody around here, a-tryin' to get our lode."

They began laying plans. Courage came back to them with the thought that they were dealing with an enemy of flesh and blood. After supper, they put out the fire and lantern and rolled up in their blankets.

Half an hour later Daoust slipped out of his poke, crept noiselessly away from the tent, and faded into the blackness of the spruces. Greever and Mecklin lay listening.

"That 'breed'll get 'em," Greever whispered. "There

ain't a white man, 'breed, or Ind'un alive that's his match in a woods. Daoust'll spot the sneaky devil out there and give him a knife between the ribs."

But in the gray of morning Daoust slipped back into camp and reported that during his all-night vigil, prowling and circling through the surrounding woods, he had not heard or seen one sign or whisper of an enemy.

"Then, we'll go after 'em and hunt 'em down," Mecklin rapped. "We're bound to strike their trail somewhere, and we'll hang onto it till we see the color of their bloody insides."

After breakfast they stuck their belts full of cartridges and started combing down the valley, swinging back and forth from rimrock to rimrock, and beating thoroughly through the thick woods. Daoust, ranging ahead, covered the ground like a dog coursing for a cold trail.

They combed the narrow valley to a point eight miles below their camp, and found nothing. The next day they hunted upvalley, but found no sign of their unknown, shadowy enemy. When they tramped home at nightfall, they were morose and quarrelsome, their nerves at the breaking point. Mecklin alone still kept a grip on himself.

"A whoop your hunch was worth!" Greever snarled at him. "Exceptin' ourselves, there ain't been a live person in this gorge since McPher— I mean, exceptin' ourselves. Daoust would've seen signs. We're hoodooed, Murph Mecklin, I tell you. Hoodooed *and worse!*"

That night, at the same hour that the dead spruce had fallen, Daoust awakened his two partners and bade them listen.

A far-away, hollow noise came echoing down the

gorge. It rose high-pitched, died to a whisper, and rose again—weird, mysterious, and hair-raising.

"Wolf," Mecklin grunted, and tried to shrug his shoulders unconcernedly.

"No wolf!" Daoust flatly contradicted.

"Then what in blazes is it, if you know so much?"

"Un't know. Never heard animal or bird cry like that."

Greever sat shivering as the call rose and fell in its weird cadence. His teeth chattered; his courage melted into nerveless terror. A whirl of night wings in a thicket made him shudder. A white owl brushing over his head brought him to his feet with an oath.

"That's the cry of a speerit!" he burst out, as the call started again. "Hear it! It's his ghost! McPherson's! He yelled identical like that when I up with the goose gun and killed—"

Mecklin's hand dropped to his belt and dragged out his heavy, snub-nosed revolver. "Shut up! You ever open your mouth ag'in about that doin's, you crybaby—just one word about it—and I'll make a ghost of *you*. That call is some kind of an animal, and the gorge is playin' tricks with the sound, that's all."

The next morning they stayed in camp, haggard and sleepy-eyed. Greever and the 'breed wanted to leave. They were for throwing everything away but their rifles and enough grub to get them out of the Left-Over. Mecklin alone kept his nerve. He laughed at their terror, though his laugh was hollow in his own ears. At sunny noonday he drove them up the valley to the Discovery, and set them to hard work to distract their minds.

Twilight came unexpectedly, as a pall of clouds

whipped over the mountains and filled the deep valley with shadows. A few heavy drops of rain fell as they threw down their tools and started for camp.

Halfway there Daoust suddenly stopped. His quick ears had caught a noise in the purple spruce shadows up the right-hand slope. As they listened, breath bated, they heard a sound as of something running—parallel with them.

Greever jerked his rifle to his cheek and fired. With one accord, they raced up the slope through the buckbrush in the direction of the noise, shooting again and again into the bushes. The queer sound retreated, came nearer, played with them, led them on and on toward their camp, and then vanished.

They stumbled to the tent and lit the lantern. As the flame rose up and the glow of light widened till it lighted up the nearest trees, Greever pointed suddenly at an object at the edge of the light, a shadow-wrapped object that looked like the head and torso of a man.

Mecklin emptied his belt-gun at it. The object quivered and fell. They went over to it, fearfully, and saw that it was a battered felt hat and a coat riddled with bullet holes.

"Gosh a'mighty, it's McPherson's coat and hat!" Greever stammered hoarsely. "He's been here, he has. He's been h'antin' us. *He* caused them accidents. Only a speerit could've changed that gold to w'uthless sand!"

From the torn lining of McPherson's coat something white fell out and fluttered to the ground. Mecklin grabbed it up, glanced at it.

"Why—uh," he gulped, his iron nerve deserting him at last, "it's a n-n-note—f-from McPherson."

Greever snatched the note away and stared at it. "Writ in his blood!" he cried brokenly. "Look't—in his own blood! Says we killed him without warnin'. Shot him in the back. And worst of all, we killed him on a Sabbath!"

"It was you killed him!" Daoust cried at Greever. "Let his h'ant keep 'way from me. I didn't—"

Greever whirled on him. "You was there too! You was a part of it all— You're as guilty as me—"

"Oh no, we ain't," Mecklin put in. "It was you as shot him, Greever, and it's you he's h'antin'. He's a-want-in' your life for his own, and he'll never rest or let us be till you're dead, Chink Greever."

Snarling like an animal in a trap, Greever dragged out his belt-gun. "If you're thinkin' on shootin' me to get rid of his h'ant, I'll blow your brains out—"

There was a movement at the edge of the fire glow. A man's figure stepped out. A cool, level voice said, "*Gentlemen!*"

The three whirled around. Hardly ten steps away a tall, lean man stood looking at them, his rifle leveled; behind him was the half-naked figure of a Blood scout.

"Put your hands up!" the tall man ordered. "Drop that gun, Greever."

For a moment the three were too stupefied to obey. It took them a little time to realize that they were face to face with living men.

"I said, put up your hands!" David Kirke repeated, sharply. "One—two—"

With a yell, Charlo Daoust crouched and kicked at

the lantern. Greever whipped up his gun and shot point-blank, in wild haste. A bullet from David's rifle tore through his heart before he could shoot again. As the lantern rolled on the moss and went out, Greever toppled backwards, dead before he sprawled on the ground.

In the next second the camp was plunged into darkness. And in the next it was filled with the cries and oaths of a hand-to-hand fight.

David saw Itai-Po leap toward where Daoust had crouched. With an oath at his wrecked plans, he himself sprang forward, swinging a clubbed rifle at the dim form of Mecklin. The stock struck only a glancing blow, and then Mecklin locked with him, clutching his gun hand. They crashed against a tree, and the rifle fell. Locked in a wrestle, they pitched into the buckbrush, hands at each other's throats. They rolled over and over, clutching each other, smashing at each other's faces in blind fury. In the darkness they broke loose, sprang to their feet, and grappled; but they tripped over a mat of roots and fell again, still locked in a wrestle, and started rolling and slipping down the steep hillside.

At the creek edge they brought up against a boulder. David tore free and sprang to his feet. Mecklin scrambled out onto the gravel bar, leaped up, and David closed with him again. In the wan moonlight of the stream-bed they smashed at each other. David lunged at Mecklin, wrapped arms around him, picked him up bodily and slammed him back against the boulder.

It was a jarring, paralyzing fall. Before Mecklin could shake off his daze, David was on top of him, pressing his face down into the gravel and bending his arms behind his back.

A shadow-silent figure moved out upon the gravel bar toward him. For a second David thought it was the Assiniboin half-breed Daoust, but then he saw that it was Itai-Po. He saw the glint of a long knife in the Indian's hand and saw the Indian wipe the blade on the leg of his deerskin trousers, and he knew that Charlo Daoust was dead. In that savage knife fight with the half-breed in the blackness, Itai-Po had killed his enemy.

"*Don't, Itai-Po!*" he ordered, as the Indian bent over Mecklin. "We don't put a man away unless we're forced to. We need this one alive anyhow—to take back with us, across the Divide. Help me tie him up."

7

Near sundown of a brooding September day, a battered canoe nosed in to the landing in the whitewood clump on Bear River. David, Itai-Po, and their prisoner got out and trudged up the path to the Mounted post.

All three of them were weary and travel-worn from the long, fast trip across the Divide. In the last two days and nights they had come a hundred and fifty miles without sleep or rest.

As they passed the Police stables they heard a shout of astonishment, and Constable Dusty Goff came rushing out, a currycomb and brush in his hand, his eyes bulging.

"Great Jumping Jeerusalem!" he gasped. "Where'n consternation have you been, Sarge? And who's this mother's son with his hands tied?"

"Take him up to the butter-tub and lock him up safe, Dusty," David said. "See that he gets something to eat and a chance to sleep. Itai-Po will answer your questions. I want to report to Inspector Haley."

As he went on to the officer's cabin, he was remembering the deserted Shannon place that he had passed a little while ago, and wondering where Esther and Paul were.

When he knocked at the cabin and went in, Inspector Haley looked at him in amazement—at his torn, muddy clothes, his unshaven face, and the other visible marks of his long wilderness trip.

"Good heavens!" Haley breathed. "I don't yet know where you've been, Kirke, but it surely was *somewhere*. Sit down. Was it the wild-goose chase you were afraid it might be?"

"I was lucky and I did all I set out to do," David said. "I cleared up the McPherson murder and brought back one of the killers."

Briefly he told the story of his and Itai-Po's patrol across the Rockies and into the unknown Left-Over. Of his original suspicions. Of the trip across and Sock-Eye Sullivan. Of the lode and the three murderers he'd found there, working it, without the slightest fear that the long arm of the Mounted would ever reach across a thousand miles of mountainous wilderness and bring them to justice.

"That's about all, sir," he finished. "Sullivan is in charge of that lode. If we can locate any of McPher-

son's people, Sullivan will get a quarter and they the rest. Otherwise, he can file for himself. Legally the gold that McPherson left with the Shannons belongs to them; he said it was to be theirs if he didn't happen to come back. It can be sent to them now, since their innocence has been proved."

Inspector Haley drew a deep breath. "It's all an astounding story, Kirke. As remarkable a patrol as the Force ever turned in. I'll get off my report to headquarters at once." He was silent a moment, thrumming on the desk. "As for the gold that McPherson left with the Shannons, we won't have to send it to them. Just after you went away, Paul came down sick, and I had him brought in here to the post, where Dr. Whittier could look after him. He seems to be picking up a bit, but it's still touch and go."

David started a little. "You mean that Esther—Is she here?"

"Yes. We fixed up one of the *métis* cabins for them." He looked at David thoughtfully for a long moment. "I think I understand this whole sorry business, Kirke, except for one point. You say that all along you suspected that some bush-sneak gentry killed McPherson for his map. Why, then, did you have the Shannons arrested and brought to trial?"

"For their own safety, sir," David answered. "You know that everybody considered their story a flimsy one. Feeling against them was running pretty high, and it finally got so ugly that I had to do something. There's always an element that wants to take things into their own hands. I had to guard the Shannon cabin every night for a week. It seemed to me that an open arrest,

trial, and acquittal was the only way to head off something dreadful."

"But why didn't you tell Esther this?"

"Before the trial she had troubles enough, sir, without my letting her know that on two different nights I stopped parties that were going to 'visit' her and Paul. And after the trial, she was so bitter that she wouldn't listen."

Haley thrummed on the desk. Finally he said, "I think I'll go down and talk to Esther, Kirke. I'm going to tell her myself all that you've told me. I don't think you're very good at tooting your own horn. I'm sure she'll want to see you and thank you. If you'll stay here, I'll send her up."

"Good heavens, not now, sir," David objected hastily. "Look how I look. I want to shave and dress—"

"That's something else you don't know about women," Haley remarked. "She's not interested in you as a fancy Dan. For her sake you went through two thousand miles of hardship and danger, and that's how you look, and that's how she ought to see you."

From the window David watched the inspector cross the Police quadrangle and knock at one of the *métis* cabins by the freight-wagon trail. He was fagged out and sleepless, but he forgot all that as he watched the cabin. The slow minutes of his waiting seemed endless. He was shaken with the uncertainty and suspense, and when he saw Esther come out at last, he went across to meet her.

Far away westward the sun was just inching down behind the massive ranges, and a sharp evening chill was creeping into the air. In the scattered clouds over-

head, the long, strange shadows of the Rockies were shifting and weaving, like a slow panorama of the Western Prairies.

When he met Esther on the path beyond the barracks, she stood stock-still and looked at him, her brown eyes seeing and understanding the signs of the long patrol that he had made for her sake.

Presently she laid her hand on his arm and said, "Can you forgive me, David?"

He gulped a little at that and scuffed awkwardly at the gravel. "It was—uh, pretty bad for everybody concerned, but it's all past," he managed. The afterglow of the sun was tangled in her hair. He drew her arm through his. "Let's walk a little. There's so much I've got to tell you, Esther. It couldn't be said before, but I can say it now—if you'll listen."



A Lamb and Some Slaughtering

“Sergeant Chinnick,” Constable Butterbaugh asked, between bites of salt fish, “may I obtain your august permission to employ a mount this soft summer evening, for private reasons unconnected with the duties of the New Inverness Detachment, Foothill Division, Northwest Mounted Police?”

"What's Ed talking about," Sergeant Chinnick inquired, looking around the supper table at the other men. "Pass me the pepper sauce, Calgary."

"He wants a hoss tonight," Corporal Babson interpreted.

"Whaffor, Ed?" Chinnick asked innocently.

His broad wink to the others was a signal that the supper-table gaff, which Constable "Calgary" Wilson had been angrily enduring for several minutes, should now be switched to Butterbaugh.

Butterbaugh looked up and caught the wink, and knew what was coming. The fair name of Mary McClellan would be dragged into the conversation and linked with his, in broad horse-jokes. Something had to be done quickly, to turn the flow of wit into another channel.

"I'm riding down to Shingletown to get drunk," he threw out, more or less without thinking.

His maneuver worked. Mary McClellan was forgotten as a gasp of mock astonishment passed around the board. They all knew Butterbaugh was joking, for he did not drink. He couldn't carry even a small snort without showing signs.

"Better watch out, Ed," somebody warned solemnly. "I hear there's a blind pig down Progress Pike. You want to hold your breath when you go past, or you *will* get stewed."

"You fellows," Butterbaugh remarked, "buzz worse than a bunch of bar-flies. To hear you talk, a man 'ud think you were all red-nosed toppers with bay windows a man could play cards on. The unstuccoed fact is, there isn't a fellow in this outfit that's been shown the

way home in the last two years. Why, if a person merely hints about going on a manly tear, it makes you gasp."

"That's no way to get promoted, Ed," Wilson observed. "Except to the hoosegow for three weeks."

The remark about getting promoted was a dig at Butterbaugh. There was a corporal vacancy in the Division, and Butterbaugh had been running neck-and-neck with a constable in a Border outfit fifty miles south. But lately Ed had fallen behind in the race, and the subject was a touchy one with him.

Sergeant Chinnick took up Wilson's remark. "You're dead wrong, Calgary; getting pickled is one of the best ways I know of to rate promotion in this outfit."

"Is that so?" someone asked. "Then I'm breaking barracks tonight and tanking up with Ed."

"Yes, it's so," Chinnick assured him. "The way I figure it is this: every one of us is a good man—"

He was interrupted by cheers. With his fork handle, Chinnick rapped for order. "As I was saying, every last one of us is the devil of a good man. We all know it; the officers all know it! Don't they tell us that, every chance they get? So if you're just a plain good man, you're lost in the mob. But if you get lit up proper and come home in a blaze of fireworks singing hallelujah, it sets you apart from the mob. It draws attention to you, *official attention*, and that's what you need for promotion in this outfit. So that's why I say getting tight is a good way for Ed to rake in that corporalecy."

"The rest of you fellows," Constable Oxford put in, "may think Chinnick is joking, but I don't. I've seen them words of his fulfilled too often. You mind three

years ago when them two Sicilians up in Northeast Koot'ny murdered them Chinamen and then shot a Provincial constable in making a getaway? They hid out in the hills from May till November. The Provincial couldn't get 'em, the Mounted couldn't get 'em, and no Indian scout would tackle the job. Orders was to shoot 'em on sight, but nobody ever got a sight.

"You fellows think you know the rest of that story, but you don't. I'll tell you the low-down truth. Corporal Holman of Division B told it to me just last month. You mind that Holman was a green buck cop then, just out of the "Awkward Squad." He says he was coming back home from a short leave; coming back on the C-P train. He was fairly well plastered, he says. Only had sense enough to know that if he lit in his home station the Patrol would collar him. So about five miles out, where the train slowed up for a rock cut, he hopped off, intending to walk on in and sober up doing it.

"He was halfway through the cut when he saw two men coming down the track. He slipped behind a pole, to let them by. When they got close, he saw it was them two Sicilians with their arms full of grub, and the very sight of 'em sobered him up in the shake of a flea's hind leg. You know how he argued it out with them, then and there. Got three bullets through his hat and got a corporalcy—all because he'd been wetting his whistle!"

"That Holman business was just a lucky accident," Constable Mack remarked. "But here's one that wasn't. Up in the Yukon a coupla springs ago, five Eskimos got trapped on a river island when the ice was going out. The river was rising over the island, and the ice cakes

was upheaving and grinding something fierce. Them Eskimos would have been dead dogs in three shakes of Bill's flea leg. But along comes Corporal—I forget his name; he was just a plain, one-horse plug of a corporal, like Babson here—

"Listen to the buck cop talking," said Babson, in a loud undertone.

"Anyhow," Mack went on, "this corporal had been nursing the grippe and had drunk a lot to keep on his feet. He was so high he didn't know exactly what he was doing. He took one look at the situation and yelled at them Eskimos to leave that island and come across the ice. They didn't have the guts. So this corporal got mad and busted across after 'em, jumping, dodging, falling. He got over to the island and drove them back across at the point of his gun. Well sir, for that little stunt the corporal got a sergeancy, a wad of hat money, a bravery medal, and a personal letter from the Commissioner—all because he was carrying a high voltage that morning!"

"That whopper you just told, Mack," Babson said, "don't hold a candle to this'n that actually happened. An inspector O.C. at a post up north was married, and his wife not only run him but the whole shebang. The men got tired of that Petticoat Sovereignty, but they never worked up nerve to kick or do anything. Then one night the sergeant happened to get top-heavy and come home at sunup. Ordinarily he was a plain old stick-in-the-mud sergeant, like Chinnick here—"

"Lissen to the two-striper talk, fellows," said Chinnick.

"—but that night," Babson went on, "he was on an

artistic toot. He stole one of the O.C.'s wife's garments and run it up the flagpole to high mast, and when the post turned out, there was a pink-silk map of Ontario fluttering in the breeze."

"What happened to the sergeant?" Wilson ventured. "Did he buy out or desert?"

"Son," Babson replied, "he did neyther. His horseplay stirred up an investigation and brought the Petticoat Sovereignty to light. The O.C. asked for a transfer and got it. The sergeant got a commission and now he's the O.C. at that post—all because, as Chinnick says, he drew official attention to himself."

"So you see, Ed," Chinnick concluded, as the men began reaching for toothpicks, "you've got the right idee for tonight, if you only stick to it. If getting thoroughly plastered won't rate you that corporal's job, try something else. Burn the Police stables, bust Inspector Plummet over the head with a chair, or even wreck a C-P train. Anything to draw that official attention. Only, getting soaked is the easiest way, because Plummet is death on booze."

When the men started to leave and the half-breed trusty began clearing mess, Butterbaugh pushed back his chair and went around to the sergeant.

"Seriously, I'd like to have a horse tonight, Chinnick. I want to ride down and see Mary a coupla hours."

Chinnick thought a minute. He was a good sergeant, John Chinnick; regimental when discipline was required, but at other times standing between the strictness of Inspector Plummet and the plain human weaknesses of the men under him. It was as though one

side of his face were a broad wink and the other side were hard-boiled discipline.

"Here's the situation, Ed," he told Butterbaugh. "Plummet is pulling off a raid tonight on a blind pig down the line. He sort of hinted there'd be no passes. Several of us will go on the raid, so the rest will probably be kept here at the post. But you won't get any time again for two weeks, so I tell you what you do. Take a horse and scoot for Shingletown. If Plummet asks about you, I'll tell him I sent you down the line ahead of us to throw off suspicion. If they see one patrol pass, they won't be expecting a second. That same bunch has slipped away from us three times already, but tonight we're raiding them just after dark. That means you have to come back early, Ed, or it'll give my story a black eye."

"I call that decent, John," Butterbaugh said heartily. "I'll be back at ten-thirty, sharp. And if Mary makes fudge, I'll bring you some."

Ten minutes later Butterbaugh started blithely on his nine-mile jog to Shingletown, where Mary's dad annually manufactured enough red-cedar shingles to roof all Amsterdam, gables included.

His spirited black horse was a splendid-looking brute. The same might also be said of Butterbaugh. He was six-feet-one, twenty-five years old, brawny, blue-eyed, and tanned to the hue of his saddle. For the occasion he was wearing red jacket, Stetson, slacks, and polished ankle-boots.

Progress Pike was merely a cinder road paralleling

the C-P tracks and leading west down Blackfoot Woe Valley. At intervals of a mile or so there were mines scattered along the pike, with a cluster of houses near each shaft. On each side of the valley a seven-thousand-foot mountain reared up, like twin sentinels.

By the time Butterbaugh reached the first mine, a mile from the post, he began to realize that salt fish and pepper sauce were no combination for a desert traveler. He had developed a red-throated thirst, which a way-side spring could not allay one particle. So at this first mine community, he stopped at a shack grocery and purchased a can of Queen Victoria tomatoes.

They helped only a little. A mile farther along he came to Mountain Siding, a narrow pass between the feet of Mt. Hanover and Mt. Spruce, where a C-P coal-and-ore train was making up for Seattle.

The thirst by this time was tormenting. His throat was tingling and he had that unpleasant, out-of-breath sensation peculiar to a salt thirst. Having already eaten one can of tomatoes, he had no particular appetite for more of them, so at the Siding grocery he purchased a can of Prince Albert cherries—big, colorless, unseeded fruit, with plenty of syrup. When he was beyond the guttering oil lights of the Siding community, he stopped, opened the can, and then rode on, forking the fruit out with his knife, squirting the seeds over the horse's head, and occasionally sipping the juice.

The cherries seemed to do the trick—for five minutes. At the end of that time a handful of centipedes were crawling up and down his throat again, and his stomach felt like a haymow on fire. He dismounted at another spring and took on water. It made little differ-

ence. He had half a mind to turn back to the post. But that move, he recollected, would give Chinnick's story a very black eye. Consequently he rode on, blessing salt fish and pepper sauce with vigor and variety.

Just before twilight he came to the Prouty-Brace Lead and Silver Mine. At the shack grocery built against the bank, he bought a can of Prince of Wales sliced pineapple.

The biting juice only made things worse up and down his neck.

At a crossroads half a mile beyond the silver-lead mine he encountered a horseman, Jim Whittaker, an ex-Mounted who had bought himself out and gone into lumbering.

"Hello, Ed!" Jim greeted him. "How's tricks at the post?"

"Same old stuff. Only we've got something new in mess. Salt fish and pepper sauce! I can't spit, I'm so dry."

"S'too bad, Ed. I et some salt fish and pepper sauce once, and I was seven hours getting back to normal. Only thing in the world that'll knock the spots off a salt fish and pepper-sauce thirst is a strong shot of Scotch. It does the trick right now."

"I'd give a leg for a shot, then," Butterbaugh said, looking up at the mountains as if interested in the weather.

Whittaker took his flask from the saddle pocket. "I haven't any use for an extry leg just now, but I'll lend you a drink anyhow. Pull easy on that. It's strong stuff, Ed, and you never could carry much."

"Oh, I don't know," Butterbaugh replied, and took a

good-sized drink. "I showed *you* the way home once. D'you mind the time, Jim, that you and me—"

They reminisced for ten minutes before Butterbaugh remembered that the evening was slipping and he had business in Shingletown, four miles on down the pike.

"How's the salt fish and pepper sauce?" Whittaker asked just before they parted.

"Better. But it's got room for considerable improvement yet."

"Another swallow would do the trick proper. But can you carry another snort, Ed?"

Jim Whittaker meant well; he had only a sincere intention of doing his former patrol partner a friendly turn. He had no idea that in the last half hour Butterbaugh had laid a firm foundation for a terrific jag. Had he known about the tomatoes, pineapple, and syruped cherries, he would not have suggested even a first drink, and certainly would not have worded his second offer in such a way that no self-respecting man could say no.

And Butterbaugh, in spite of his airs to the contrary, was a rank novice with things distilled. He harbored not the slightest notion that whisky to him just then was like a lighted match to a keg of powder. In short, his innocence betrayed him.

A couple of generations ago in the West, The White Buffalo was a common name for respectable saloons. The significance lay in the fact that the white buffalo was a rare beast. What the proprietor meant was that barrooms as orderly and good as his own were rare

articles. In The White Buffaloes you could generally meet respectable people; could get good liquor if you had the money, and good food whether you had money or not; and the chances of your becoming an innocent bystander to a faro quarrel were reasonably small.

But the name degenerated, as good names will, and the extent of the degradation was complete when Slith Benders elected to start a blind pig in the New Inverness district, and chose The White Buffalo for its whispered name. However, the name was still appropriate in an odd sense—blind pigs within raiding distance of the Mounted post were rare beasts truly enough.

At Benders' joint, the price of a pint of pink-eye was a day's hard labor in a mine-head. The lad who was broke and hungry, and asked for a sandwich and coffee, was given a surly "Git the blazes out'n here." His place drew the scum of the district—the knife-toters, the small-potato badmen, the would-be desperadoes, and the worst of the foreign element.

The Mounted kept hot on Slith Benders' heels. Progress Pike and adjacent territory was patrolled by Corporal Babson and Constable Mack, and either of them could spot a blind pig within a short time after it opened up. Consequently Benders had moved three times in half a year, always slipping out just ahead of the Mounted raids.

Benders' present mug-room, two miles from Shingletown, was a small, dark cubbyhole dug into a bank behind a grocery shack. A single heavy door led out into the legitimate place of business, where groceries, cold drinks, and greasy lunches were sold. The busi-

ness at the rear speedily laid that of the front in the shade, for Benders had the right location. Within two miles were the Shingletown factories, four coal mines employing Galicians, several lumber camps of mixed crews, and a considerable sprinkling of *métis*.

Benders himself, a ponderous, beefy man, was too slow-witted to manage a blind pig successfully. For that purpose he employed as his hopper one "Soapy" Smith, a Vancouver derelict, who drummed up trade in cautious fashion and kept a weather eye out generally. It was Soapy who established a half-breed connection with the Mounted post and so got wind of impending raids in time to clear out. Had his brains been directed toward legitimate pursuits, Soapy would have gone far, for he was quick of wit, sharp of eye, and some of his schemes were little short of artistic.

That evening Soapy was standing in the shack door looking up the pike toward the crossroads. Benders and a half-breed were hastily throwing canned goods, liquors, small fixtures, and various supplies into boxes. The huckster wagon which was to transport the whole stock to a place of safety was due at any time. A few customers still lingered—a sooty Galician, a shingle-factory worker, a strapping big Negro, and two watery-eyed, nondescript whites.

In the doorway Soapy suddenly ejaculated, "Jeerusalem!"

Benders straightened up with a jerk, his face quivering. "What's th' matter? It ain't the P'lice already?"

Soapy quieted his fears with a gesture and bade him listen. Up the pike a hundred yards a voice was raised in hilarious song:

*"We'll nail the old flag to the talles' flagpole
An' we'll all re-enlis' . . ."*

"What's that?" Benders demanded. "Who is it?"

In Soapy's brain, thoughts began clicking, wheels spun, schemes whirled and flashed, and finally out came an idea, all shiny, slick, and fascinating.

"Who is it?" he echoed. "Why, it's a lamb, dat's wot!"

Benders strode to the door. Ed Butterbaugh was just then passing through the glare of an oil light. The red of his uniform showed resplendent, but otherwise his appearance was not exactly regimental. His jacket was unbuttoned, his Stetson had been placed lovingly on his horse's ear, and one leg was flung across the mount's neck.

"Lamb!" Benders spluttered excitedly. "That's a Mounted constable. You'll soon think he's a pair of panthers. Git inside! Close th' door! Out'n th' light!"

"Easy, easy," Soapy bade him. "Dat Yaller-Stripe is stewed to de gills and harmless. He's a lamb, I say."

"What d'you mean—lamb?"

"He's a lamb wot's a-walking right into his bloody slaughter. When I git through wit' dat—"

"You let that p'liceman alone, Soapy," Benders ordered. "Don't you go monkeying—"

"Lis'n, I c'n outsmart de smartest Yaller-Stripe dat ever come down de pike—see? We're clearing out anyhow, ain't we? Watch me handle dat gazabo. He's pickled already, and 'twon't be any trick to draw 'im in and give 'im a couple more swigs. Den we'll stretch 'im out on de floor in de back room—see?"

"Wot good'll that do us?" Benders demanded.

"Wot good, hiy? Lis'n here. When we git ready to pull freight, we'll tag a note on dis Yaller-Stripe saying he was one of our best customers and kep' giving us warning about de raids. Dat'll steer suspicion away from dis half-breed—see? But dat ain't de big idee. Dey'll come in and find us gone and find dere own man here *dead drunk in de place dey was going to raid*. Lu'me Susie, won't dat be a wham at de whole bloody outfit!"

Even slow-witted Benders saw the sword-neat deviltry of Soapy's idea. He was itching for vengeance on the Mounted, who had been chasing him out of each location as soon as he got a good trade going; and here was vengeance with a vengeance. It made no difference to him that the scheme would mean disgrace, imprisonment, and a wrecked career for the unfortunate constable.

His face cracked in a huge, slow grin. "He's your meat, Soapy."

He stepped behind the counter and busied himself with a dustcloth. The other men sat tight, watching and ready to help.

From the door of the grocery, Soapy hailed the constable. "Hi-yuh, Mister P'liceman! Nice evening, eh wot?"

Ed Butterbaugh was in that mellow condition where he loved the whole world and was positive that the whole world loved him. The two drinks, on top of the mixture of fruit and syrup, had made him dizzy, and very, very happy.

At the friendly hail, he pulled over to the grocery shack and stopped.

"Where might you be going, Mister P'liceman, on such a fine horse on such a fine evening, Mister P'liceman?"

Butterbaugh attempted to tell Soapy, by song, that he was going to see his lady-love who lived by the old millstream.

"Come in a bit," Soapy urged, with a hand on Ed's leg. "Come in and rest your bottom—excusing my langwidge. We'll smoke us a seegar and sing us a song, and—"

Butterbaugh dismounted and went in.

Soapy seated him at a table and gave him a cigar. They smoked, they sang, they mutually swore a lasting friendship. Presently Soapy suggested a friendly drink of whisky. Sheer cleanly habit, more than anything else, made Butterbaugh refuse.

"Just a beer then," Soapy persisted. "We've got de real Cascade here, partner." He nodded to Benders.

The beer came. Butterbaugh's glass was laced with raw white alcohol, but he was in no condition to notice, and beer was not outlawed in the detachment. He drank it. Another appeared and he drank that. The rot-gut alcohol began to work on him quickly.

At a gesture from Soapy, the shingle-factory hand sauntered casually out of the door. A patter of hoofs a few moments later should have warned Butterbaugh that his mount was cantering back to the post, riderless. The Police would wonder and worry, and then, when they found the horse's rider lying drunk in a blind pig, they'd be fit to be tied.

Pretending to get fresh cigars, Soapy slipped over to the counter. He scribbled hastily on a tag, slipped it

under a tobacco can for future use, and then whispered to Benders, "Dope de next glass of beer. We got to git out of here. It's dark outside. Wonder where Jake is wid dat wagon? Dat patrol might be on de road for here now. We got to work fast. Dope 'er strong."

Soapy had craftily seated Butterbaugh with his back to the counter so that he could see nothing. But there was a dirty washbasin against the wall facing the constable, and a mirror hung on the wall above the basin. Benders, across the shack, was working by a fairly bright oil lamp. Butterbaugh had not yet taken leave of common sense; he was simply happy and friendly. He was perilously near the rocky edge; he was getting drowsy, but he could still think and his mind could grasp a hard fact.

In the mirror he saw Benders surreptitiously drop something into the foaming glass of beer, and saw the other four men nudge one another, grinning. The act brought him up as sharply as though a bullet had whizzed past his throat. His first reaction was an instinctive recoil from a suspicious thing. It was a moment before the thought processes in his brain could work.

Then the thought beat in his brain that he was being drugged; that Benders was putting dope in his glass.

The shock of this realization sobered him considerably, and he looked around, like one suddenly awake. He was all but sure, now, that he was in a drink den. What were they up to? Murder? Robbery? Hardly. The half-filled boxes on the floor, the half-empty shelves on the wall—they were moving out, in a hurry. Then he

remembered that Chinnick had said Plummet intended to raid a blind pig that night. This must be the place.

Roughly Butterbaugh saw through the plot. He had a swift picture of himself being found there dead drunk by Chinnick, Mack, and Oxford—and by Inspector Plummet. Of the story echoing up and down the whole valley, to the great harm of the Force.

Soapy was watching him curiously, wondering what had happened. Butterbaugh noticed his suspicions. While he got himself together and shook off the giddiness, he pretended to be sinking further into the stupor of drink. He blossomed out in song. He gushed nonsense, and thumped Soapy on the back. He ordered drinks for the house and put the wrong end of the cigar into his mouth.

Reassured, Soapy nodded to Benders. The third glass appeared on the table.

Slouched down in his chair, his head wagging from shoulder to shoulder, Butterbaugh was doing the quickest, hardest thinking he had ever done. He knew he was in no condition just then to fight, and if he tried to escape, all eight of the men would pile into him. So it was his wits against theirs.

The first thing to do was to get control of himself again. He kept saying to himself, over and over, "You're *not* drunk. You're mad! Madder than billy hell!"

When the doped glass was set in front of him, he raised it clumsily to his lips. The glass slipped somehow and spilled over his face.

"Water!" he bawled. "Wanna wash. Wersh some water?"

Hiding his chagrin, Soapy got up and poured water into the dirty basin. Anything to jolly the Yellow-Stripe along and get him to swallow the dope.

Butterbaugh staggered to the basin and dashed cold water on his face. It freshened him up even more than he had expected.

"Z'too blasted hot'n here," he grumbled, making a ludicrous attempt to get his arms out of his jacket sleeves.

Because the minutes were fleeting, Soapy quickly helped him get the jacket off, and led him back to the table. Butterbaugh ran his thumb along a chair rung till he found a sliver. He pushed that sliver a quarter inch up under his thumbnail. The pain brought beaded sweat to his forehead, but it worked a wonder inside his brain. It killed the silly giddiness vaporizing around in his head. It killed the lethargy which had started to numb his limbs. It gave him command of his muscles and nerves again. He was ready.

Benders had doped another glass for him. Butterbaugh knew he could not fuzzle that one, or they would know he was tricking them. He had to do something in a matter of three seconds—while Benders was coming from the counter to the table.

His eyes roved drunkenly around the room. The clock said one minute past nine. The patrol might get there in another minute, or it might not come for an hour. No looking to them—he was on his own, with eight men to whip.

He saw the half-breed go into the cavelike rear room. "Whazzat?" he demanded, waving a wobbly arm toward the door. "Zat a bear den?"

Soapy fairly leaped at his chance. "It's a nice cool place to take a drink in," he said quickly. "Let's go back. Wot say?"

"Lezall gol" Butterbaugh agreed violently. "Drink zon me. C'mon, everybody!"

The shingle-factory worker and the two nondescript whites got up eagerly at this invitation to a free drink. The Galician probably did not understand. He sat still, as did the Negro. Butterbaugh tried twice to rise, but failed. Soapy helped him to his feet and supported him toward the door. By this time the other three were already inside, with the half-breed.

At the doorway something swift and drastic happened to Soapy. A strong hand suddenly took him by the neck and another by the slack of his pants. He was lifted up bodily and heaved into the room against the two whites, so hard that all three sprawled in a heap. The door to the dugout banged shut and the bolt slid home.

With five of his enemies disposed of at one neat scoop, Butterbaugh whirled around and grabbed a chair. He had even picked out the handiest chair beforehand, for he suspected that Benders had a counter gun, and a fraction of a second might be vital. As Benders stooped for his weapon, a heavy chair whirled clear across the room and collided violently with that portion of his anatomy which was above the counter. Benders went down, struck his head, and was too dazed to get up at once.

The Galician broke for the door. But the leers and covert insults of the last few minutes had stung Butterbaugh to fury, and he sprang for the Galician, caught

him, whirled him around, and swung murderously. Two uppercuts and a straight sock to the jaw, and the Galician was out for good.

The Negro was left. He stood against the wall behind a table. Butterbaugh caught a flash in his hand and stopped. The man had a razor out, the handle clutched tight, the blade laid back against his wrist. Evidently thinking that Butterbaugh was scared and would run, he came out of his barricade with a rush and swung at the constable—a sideswipe which would have cut Butterbaugh's throat had he not jumped back, grabbed a second chair, and swung. The blow knocked the razor from the Negro's hand, but it did not fell him. Butterbaugh bored in with his bare fists and hammered the Negro back against the wall.

He was within one good solid blow of a complete victory when he saw the Negro cringe. "Don' shoot, Mass'r Benders!" the man yelled. "Foh Gawd's sake, don' shoot!"

Butterbaugh did not even turn to look. As he ducked and jumped aside, a bullet whizzed over him. He grabbed another chair, for he was twelve feet away from the counter. As he lifted it, a bullet caught him in the leg. But he whirled the chair and sent it hurtling across the room.

The chair struck Benders a glancing blow, but it staggered him and stopped the shooting. In two jumps the constable was across the room, over the counter, and wresting the gun away from Benders. They grappled, and sprawled in the center of the room.

The Negro jumped in to help. Butterbaugh sprang

to his feet and waded into him barehanded. His left caught the Negro on the jaw; his right, which he aimed for the point of the chin, was an inch low. It caught the Negro in the throat—and the man wilted, his legs sagged, his eyes rolled, and he fell over backward.

“Now then, you pink-eye peddler,” Butterbaugh growled at Benders, who was on his feet again, “we’ll settle this—you and me.”

Unable to guard himself, Benders took a dozen savage blows before he was knocked to his knees. Once more Butterbaugh was within one good solid blow of being out on top. If he had polished Benders off then and there, the fight would have been over. But he did not. Outside the door, he heard horses come galloping up and stop. Several horses, it sounded like to him.

He thought, “The patrol’s here,” and reluctantly he let up on Benders. The newcomer was inside the door and only a jump away before Butterbaugh realized that the patrol had *not* arrived. The big, husky stranger had a hickory brake handle in his hand, as though he had heard the noise and knew there was trouble up.

“Git ’im, Jake,” Benders snarled. “Smash ’im. Let’s bash his fool brains out.”

Butterbaugh realized, too late, that he should have hit the driver as the man came through the door. One good swing with the chair would have put the fellow away. But now the fight was thrown into a cocked hat again.

Cursing his mistake in letting a fresh enemy get inside, Butterbaugh tore into the newcomer, dodged a smashing swing of the brake handle, and grappled

with the man. They crashed into the remaining table, broke it down, and fell across it. They sprang up again, stood leg to leg, and traded fist smacks to the face.

Something warm began to run down Butterbaugh's temple and into his right eye. Benders, still groggy, had hold of half a chair and was pecking away at the constable's shoulders. Butterbaugh sidestepped the driver for a moment, swung on Benders, and sent him reeling with a long-swinging uppercut.

Then he and the big wagon-driver locked again. Crashing back and forth, from wall to wall, they finished wrecking the little shack. They upset the packing boxes and scattered the goods. They slammed against the thin-boarded walls and jarred down what canned stuff remained on the shelves. They pitched into the sheet-iron stove, knocked it down, upset the tables, and banged the flimsy counter over against the wall.

Half-blinded and very nearly exhausted, Butterbaugh knew he had reached his limit. He had to whip in a few seconds or go down.

He broke loose and grabbed a chair—his stand-by all evening. The driver grabbed for it and tried to wrest it away. Between them, they tore it in two. A fraction of a second the quicker, Butterbaugh swung with his portion and knocked his enemy down. Benders was pecking at him again, but he paid no heed. He fell on the driver, grabbed him by the hair, and banged his head against the floor. Benders hammered him unmercifully, but the constable stuck it out, till he felt his man go limp.

"That's the size of you, Brake Handle," he snarled, and rose up. "Now, you, you—" His voice rose in a rage

at Benders. "I'm going to kill you this time. With my bare fists, so help me!"

At the first bone-smashing swing, Benders slumped against a wrecked table. Butterbaugh stood over him, hammering him to the point where he would not shoot at a man's back again, or attack a person with a chair when he was fighting another man. With berserk fury boiling in him, the constable hardly knew what he was doing; and he might have made good his threat to kill Benders, if they had not been interrupted.

His ears caught the sound of horses galloping, slowing, stopping just outside the store.

With a last gasp of strength, Benders turned his body toward the door as if expecting help. Somebody banged into the door, but Butterbaugh was not caught napping that time. He finished Benders with a terrific wallop, caught up the sole remaining chair. When the door slammed open and his blood-filled eyes saw a man burst in, he whirled the chair, crashed it against the man's head, and knocked the newcomer flat.

"Hey, Ed!" a voice burst out, behind the first intruder. "Hey, what the devil? Stop it, Ed—it's us!"

Through a reddish haze, Butterbaugh saw Sergeant Chinnick, Babson, Oxford, Mack, and Constable Ettersson pour into the shack.

The two noncoms pulled the first man to his feet and held him up.

"Are you bad hurt, sir?" one of them asked. "Ed didn't go to do it, sir."

Butterbaugh drew a hand across his eyes and took one horrified look— *He had broken the chair over the head of Inspector Plummet.*

Chinnick and Babson walked their officer around the room a couple of times, explaining what had happened.

"I'm all right, boys," the inspector said presently, shaking his head as if still hearing bells. "But—look at Constable—"

Butterbaugh, standing half-dazed in the middle of the room, looked like a first-class wreck. The sleeves had been torn off his shirt, and the shirt itself slit to ribbons. His right trouser leg was blood-soaked, his face was covered with blood, his hands looked like prime ribs of beef.

"I didn't go to hit you, sir," he said groggily. "I thought you was reinforcements for this gang, like arrived just before you did, and I had to smash 'em before they got me."

Plummet had been looking around at the wrecked shack and the four husky figures that were *hors de combat*. "Lord," he said, "men lying all over the place!"

"There's five more in that back room, sir," Butterbaugh told him. "They were shooting through the door a little while ago, but they're quiet now."

The inspector whistled thoughtfully. "Nine of 'em! Nine men and a blind pig, all by yourself! And on top of all that, bashing your Officer Commanding with a chair— What sort of holy tiger are you anyhow, Butterbaugh?"

When Sergeant Chinnick dropped in the next morning at ten o'clock, Butterbaugh was sitting up in bed. He had court plaster over most of his face, a big band-

age on his leg; and his hands, clumsily holding the *Calgary Star*, were swathed like a prizefighter's.

"What's happening outside?" Butterbaugh asked. He missed the familiar round of morning duties and his patrol.

"Well, one thing, you got a box of candy from Shingletown. I guess the news got down there."

"Candy? Where is it?"

"I et it," Chinnick said shamelessly. "Babson and I did. We figured you was a sick man and oughtn't to have any."

Butterbaugh glared at him.

Chinnick went on, "Another thing. I heard Plummet talking to the Division O.C. over the long-distance telephone wire this morning. I wasn't eavesdropping; the door just happened to be open. Plummet told him three times about how you crowned him with that chair. He thinks it's the best joke that ever struck him. You ought to've heard them laugh. You'd almost think they was human. And afterwards Plummet says to me—you know that parade-rest language of his—he says, 'The incident of last night will undoubtedly react to Butterbaugh's advantage and standing.' I guess you know what that means."

Ed Butterbaugh flushed slightly. It was the only indication of his leap of heart at this prospect of getting his coveted promotion.

Chinnick leaned forward and lowered his voice. "Looky, Ed, about this affair last night. There was queer doings went on and I want the straight of it. Just between you and me. This Soapy Smith was mad as

cats at you this morning when Plummet examined him. He swore you came down the pike drunk and they pulled you in and got you drunker, and was getting ready to dope you. Benders and the other prisoners swore that Soapy was telling the truth. But Plummet just laughed at 'em. He thinks you was playing drunk in order to trick 'em. The harder they swore, the more he laughed.

"But looky, Ed. Down there last night, when we was sorting the men out of the furniture, I run acrost a note scribbled on a tag. It was signed by Soapy and I read it. It said you was one of their best customers and had been passing them word right along about the raids. Now, what was Soapy driving at, Ed? I destroyed that tag; I didn't know what to make of it and I didn't want to take any chances."

Butterbaugh thought for a minute before he understood what Soapy's purpose was. When he saw through it finally, it made him shiver.

"Chinnick," he said, "at the supper table last night you fellows cooked up some tall stories about the way to get promoted in this outfit. But this story of mine last night is the beat of 'em all. What's more, it's the living truth, so help me. Listen—"

He began telling the story. Chinnick's eyes got wider and wider; his chair inched closer and closer. At the end of Butterbaugh's story he drew a long, deep breath.

"Lord," he commented softly. "If you was Irish, I could understand luck like that, Ed!"

He strode to the window and stood thinking. Presently he turned around. "Say, listen. You got drunk and

crowned Plummet with a chair, and it's getting you a corporalcy. But why stop with a corporalcy, Ed? Why don't you burn the Police stables or wreck a C-P train, and keep climbing right on up?"

Butterbaugh grinned at him. "Maybe I will, Chin-nick—sometime. But right now, I'm not tired of wearing them two stripes yet."



The Constable of Lone Sioux

Between strokes of the currycomb and brush, Constable Prawl was outlining the day's work to his sorrel mare, as she cropped the dew-wet grass behind the lonesome cabin on Lone Sioux Run.

"We'll mosey down toward the Border today, Molly m'lady, and take a look-see through Dry Bottoms. Last time I heard from Red Haley, Red said there was a two-man whisky outfit som'eres down

that way. These Yankee Sioux are bad enough eggs when they're sober, but if they ever get a supply of blaze-belly, they'll stage a Little Big Horn with us Mounted, and there won't be enough left of the Force out here on these plains to use for seed!"

The morning sun was just gilding the tops of the tall whitewoods that sheltered the outpost cabin of the Mounted Police, and a gray smoke was curling up from the waters of the small creek. In a dead elm a magpie, a whisky-jack, and a red squirrel were quarreling over a vine of wild blue grapes, and upstream a grouse boomed its hollow wilderness note.

Six miles westward a range of timbered, pathless hills lifted up out of the prairie, but to north, east, and south the rolling plains stretched away almost unbroken. Swept by winter blizzards and browned by the long summer sun, the country was a wild, lonely land, unsettled, unclaimed, but fought over fiercely by bands of roving Assiniboin, Sioux, and Chippewas, who hunted the small herds of buffalo that strayed up from the Montana badlands.

A few years before, the cabin in the whitewoods had been a rendezvous for a whisky-trading outfit, but at the coming of Colonel McLeod's troop of Yellow-Stripes, the traders had slunk back across the Border. Then the cabin had been made a patrol outpost of the Mounted Police, where they could watch the Indian bands and also keep liaison with the U.S. Cavalry company stationed across the Line.

To the men of Inspector Milton's detachment, the place had become known as "Deserter's Delight" and "The Hop-Off." Whenever a Mounted constable or

noncom became disgruntled, clashed with an officer, or could not stand up to the raw, hard life, he was detailed to Lone Sioux Run, where it was expected of him to step quietly across the Border and drop into the limbo of forgotten men.

That was the reason why, almost a year ago, Constable Bingham Prawl had been exiled from the main Police post, sixty miles northwest, and detailed to the Lone Sioux cabin. Big, rawboned, and restless, Prawl had his strong points, but he was hot-tempered and blunt, and his officers considered him too insubordinate to waste time on.

Finished with the currycombing, Prawl went into the cabin for his saddle, guns, and pack. As he was buckling the bellyband on the mare, he stopped suddenly, listening. From far-away south, the crisp morning air brought him the faint popping of a rifle.

The shots were patterned: two shots, and an interval; then one shot and a longer interval; then two more.

"That's for us, Molly," Prawl grunted. "Wants us to wait for him. Whoever he is, he seems to know that we ride off about this time. Wonder what's on his mind."

He finished saddling up, lighted his cob pipe, and waited, while the mare fell to grazing again. A few minutes later Prawl happened to look westward; he saw a thin column of smoke spiraling up from the brow of the nearest hill, six miles away. Presently the spiral broke into abrupt puffs, which were tossed out to right and left of the perpendicular column.

Prawl reached for his Service glasses and studied

the smoke. A puzzled look spread over his weathered face.

"Another signal for us, Molly! And if I know smoke talk, it's another message for us to wait. Two visitors all at once . . . Here we go for weeks not seeing anybody, and so lonesome that a fellow almost starts shaking hands with the willows, and then all at the same time two mother's sons come bobbing up out of the prairie!"

The smoke signal tailed off. Silence brooded over the little valley of Lone Sioux and the dun country around it.

As Prawl focused his glasses on the hills, he was startled by an unexpected shout just to the south of the cabin. Instinctively he whirled around and reached for his Snider carbine. But then he dropped the weapon to his foot and waited.

A shaganappi cayuse and rider broke through the willow thicket, splashed recklessly across the creek, and galloped up to him. A Crow Indian, hardly more than eighteen years old and slender as a reed, leaped off the pony with a terse "Wock!" of greeting.

Prawl nodded. "How're you, Jumping Deer? You surelee got here fast since your signal shots. How's everything south of the Border?"

The young Indian shrugged. "Plenty peace talk, but no peace. Plenty trouble with Sioux all time." He motioned west toward the hills, where stray wisps of the smoke signal still lingered. "Who make that smoke talk, huh?"

"Un't know," Prawl said. "Except it's somebody on the way here." He looked at the young Crow in-

quiringly. "What brought you up here through those Sioux hunting parties? Did Corporal Haley send you?"

Jumping Deer nodded, then reached down and pulled a dirty paper from his legging. Prawl smoothed the creases out of the page and saw that it was a lengthy penciled message to him, on a requisition sheet of the U.S. Cavalry. Dated thirty-six hours previously, at field headquarters across the Border, it was from Trooper Red Haley, with whom he had ridden many a long patrol along the line.

He held the paper to the morning sun and read:

Dear Bing,

I got your message about looking out for those Stonies with the stolen cayuses, but I haven't seen hide nor hair of 'em so far. I'd guess that by now they've either et the cayuses or traded 'em to the Sioux, but I'll keep on looking.

But what I'm writing you about, Bing, is these Sioux. I'm getting good and tired at the way they're being mollycoddled along. Just about every day some new General or some Silk-Hat from Washington comes here to powwow with 'em and say, "Please, Mister Laughing Grizzly, stop killing people and setting the ranges on fire. Please be a good boy and quit tomahawking the Crows and Blackfeet and Chippewas." They're actually going to send a delegation up there to ask Sitting Bull to come back across the Border where he belongs. And him wearing Custer's ring!

But Sitting Bull is never going to come back unless something drastick is done. He'll sit right where

he is till the cows come home. Your Big Augers have been babying him the same as mine, and I'll bet my watch against your shirt button that you're as tired of it as I am.

After all these Generals and Big Noises have failed, wouldn't it be funny, Bing, if a buck cop like you and a two-striper like me would up and tie a can to Sitting Bull's tail that'd bring him to taw quick? Well, I've got an idea. And it's a good one. I've thought it all through, and I believe the two of us can ram it home.

The only thing is, it's a plumb dangerous trick, Bing. If the Sioux ever catch on to our game, our carcasses won't be worth hauling home for tallow—

A yell from the direction of the hills broke into Prawl's reading. He shot once with his revolver to let the man know he was waiting, and then read the rest of Corporal Haley's letter.

It sketched the plan in considerable detail, along with a carefully marked chart of the hills and creeks down toward the Border, and closed with a second warning of what would happen to one Canadian Mounted Policeman and one U.S. Cavalry corporal if the Sioux ever caught them or even got suspicious of them.

Prawl read the letter again, slowly this time. For a minute or two he stood there wide-legged, thinking hard. He realized that the two of them would be taking their lives in their hands, and he was not at all sure that the scheme would have substantial results, even if they carried it out successfully and escaped

the Sioux afterwards. But still the plan looked good to him. If it worked, it would undermine Sitting Bull's power and hand that leadership over to those Sioux chieftains who wanted to end the bloodshed that had been sweeping the Plains so long.

Slowly Prawl's face hardened and his big fist clenched. "By the Great Horn Spoon," he swore silently, "I'll try it. If I lose, if the Sioux catch me—well, I won't have to be a sneaking deserter."

Half a mile west of the creek, a second Indian rode over a swell and waved his arms. As the man came closer, Prawl recognized him as Many Eagles, a roving Chippewa subchief who had a band of ten lodges.

Many Eagles and his fourteen bucks were in bad odor with the Mounted. They were suspected of stealing horses, killing cattle, and starting prairie fires to drive game. Nothing had been proved against them, however. While Prawl did not particularly care for this Chippewa band, he disliked to see them accused of crimes that other Smokies might have committed.

The subchief was in a high pitch of excitement as he yanked his pony up short from a dead run and tumbled off face to face with the Policeman. In broken English, sign talk, and a torrent of Chippewa, he poured out an alarming story.

The main facts, as Prawl gathered them, were that Many Eagles and his ten families had been camped at a little lake twenty miles southwest; that Sitting Bull and a large band of Sioux had appeared, captured the Chippewas, and were now holding them

prisoners, maltreating them and threatening them with death.

The subchief had managed to escape during the night and come for help.

Prawl swore a hard oath at the news. Inasmuch as Sitting Bull's band had killed seven Chippewas under similar circumstances just a couple of months ago, the Sioux chief would probably carry out his threats.

Absently patting the mare, Prawl tried to think.

Sergeant Dave Larett and eight men were stationed thirty-seven miles northwest and Inspector Milton's post was twenty miles farther on. To get word to either detachment would take an entire day, and for them to send a detail to the Sioux would take another day or more. In all probability they would reach the Sioux camp too late to save the Chippewas.

"I guess it's up to me," he decided. "Though what one man can do there—you probably can stick it in your eye. Afterwards, if I get away from there alive, I'll start to work on this idea of Haley's."

He took out the letter again, read it a third time, and studied the map till a clear picture of it was fixed in his mind. Then he tore the message to small pieces and gave them a fling.

"Jumping Deer," he bade the young Crow, "after you get yourself a good meal and rest your pony, go back and tell Corporal Haley that I'm throwing in with him on that plan. Tell him I'll start my part of it to working either late this evening or tomorrow morning. About yourself—on this ride back, you'd

better swing 'way east so's you won't run into any of these Sioux game-scouting parties. The Sioux are trying to hog the buffalo in this country and they're shooting everyone on two laigs that they meet up with."

He turned to Many Eagles. "All right. You and I'll high-tail it for the main Sioux camp—" He broke off, listening again.

From the prairie to the northwest came the patterned shots of a rifle, signaling him to wait.

"Still another mother's son wanting to see me!" he grunted. "You two go inside and eat while I find out who this is and what he wants."

A few minutes later a horseman rode out of a patch of timber up Lone Sioux and cantered leisurely toward the cabin. Prawl recognized him as a half-breed scout named Colquhuon, who was attached to Inspector Milton's post.

"What is it this time, Colquhuon—an order or a bawling out?" Prawl asked, as the half-breed dismounted. "Or did the O.C. send you down to see if I'd deserted yet?"

The half-breed handed him an envelope. Prawl tore it open. As he scanned the note from Inspector Milton, his eyes hardened and anger burned in him. The note was both order and reprimand—a curt order and a plain hint that he had been lax in his patrolling. The message read:

Several more head of stock are reported killed by the Indians at Three Leavings. These were valuable government cattle given to the half-breeds there. I have

evidence that the killing was done by Chippewas—in all likelihood by Many Eagles' band. This occurred in your territory. I must ask you to drop any other affairs you may be engaged on and clear this up at once. I expect an immediate report from you.

In a blaze of anger, Prawl looked up at the half-breed. "Go back and tell Inspector Milton that I said he can go to blazes! Tell him that a Sioux scouting party killed them cattle. Tell him—"

Colquhuon interrupted. "I tell de O.C. nutting, *m'sieu* Konstable. You write eet down an' I take eet to heem, *oui*; but tell heem, *non!*"

"All right, then!" Prawl snapped. He tore a sheet from his patrol book, fished a pencil stub from his pocket, and printed a reply to Inspector Milton:

I've got no time just now to go riding patrol on some dead bossies. Your evidence against the Chippewas isn't worth a bodewash chip, anyhow. If I'm not patrolling this territory to suit you, you know what you can do about it.

As he signed the defiant note and thrust it at the half-breed, he realized that this was at long last the end of the Mounted trail for him. He was not only disobeying a plain order, but he was telling his O.C. to go jump. The consequences would be swift and certain. Inspector Milton would order him back to detachment headquarters, on charges. And that meant the sorrowful ride across the Border and fading out of the Force.

Colquhuon spoke up. "When I pass Sergeant La-

rett's post, he read dat letter from de O.C., and den he write you on de back. *Voilà*."

Prawl turned the paper over and read Sergeant Larett's hastily scribbled note:

The O.C. is on a mean prod about those cattle, Bing, so don't think anything about his being sort of sharp with you. If you need any help down there, just hol-ler and I'll try to spare you a constable for a few days. Or come myself.

The warmth and friendliness of Dave Larett's note gave Prawl a bad minute. Larett had had faith in him all along. Dave Larett had remarked a score of times, "Bing Prawl is no deserter. You'll see. He'll stick there on Lone Sioux till hell freezes." Now he was letting Dave Larett down; bighearted, understanding Dave, who had stuck up for him, believed in him.

But then he thought of Inspector Milton's constant reprimands and humiliations. Of the time when, as a last resort, he had lost two Police horses in a soup-thin muskeg, and how the inspector had fined him six months' pay. Of how he had captured the three whisky-runners one winter and then they'd overpowered him and escaped, and how he'd been fined and quartered for that. And of similar accidents, such as happened to the other men right along and nothing said.

He thought, "I'm on the toboggan in this outfit, and it's time I go. Time and past time. I'll try to help out Many Eagles, and I'll carry out my end of Haley's plan. Then . . ."

2

Four hours after they left the cabin on Lone Sioux Run, Prawl and Many Eagles pushed their foam-lathered horses up to the crest of a low hill and saw the Sioux camp straight ahead of them, a mile away.

The camp was spread out over a grassy prairillon, locked in by some buckbrush hills and rocky buttes. In the middle of the prairillon was a lake, with buffalo-skin tepees pitched around it. Though the camp numbered over a hundred and fifty lodges, it was only one of the half-dozen Sioux camps that were scattered for a hundred miles along the Border and well up into the Canadian territories, for the Sioux were hard-pressed for food and had spread out for better hunting.

The ten unpainted Chippewa tents were still standing among the Sioux tepees. Between the camp and the surrounding hills the Sioux horses were pasturing. Most of them were the ordinary shaganappi of the Sioux, but with his glasses, Prawl could see little knots of horses that had been stolen from Montana and Dakota ranches; and one small *remuda* of about twenty mounts, trim, fine chestnuts, bore the regimental brand of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry.

Four years previously the Sioux and their allies had fled across the Forty-Ninth Parallel after the massacre of the Little Big Horn. Their demands to be given reservations in Canada had been refused, but they had stayed on, ignoring the generous offers which General Terry had made to them if they would return to the States. Unwilling to see them starve, the Mounted Police had given them rations during the lean months and

supplied them with enough ammunition for hunting. In Sioux fashion, they had repaid the kindness by defying the government, killing small bands of Chippewas and Stonies, burning the prairies to drive game, and exhorting the bigger Canadian tribes to league with them and wipe out all the whites in the Northwest.

Prawl had no difficulty in identifying Sitting Bull's big tepee, pitched at the north end of the lake. The camp was thronged with bucks; he estimated their number at between three and four hundred. During the few minutes that he watched, one hunting party came in from the west with an antelope and a deer, and another party rode away to scout.

With Many Eagles behind him, Prawl rode down the long slope, passed out of the scrubby timber, and struck across the prairillon for Sitting Bull's tent.

They were noticed as soon as they left the timber, and a tense quiet settled over the whole Sioux encampment. The older men idling around the tepees bunched up in knots, the younger bucks broke off their games, and several warriors hurried to Sitting Bull's lodge to tell the chieftain that one of the Yellow-striped *Sheemoginish* was coming into the camp.

Keeping a good grip on himself, Prawl headed between the tepees and knots of Indians straight for Sitting Bull's tent. He rode along, jaunty and erect, nodding slightly at warriors whom he had seen at one time or another. A couple of them grunted "How." The rest did not reply at all. They seemed to know very well what he had come for. Their silence and the plain hostility on their faces sent little shivers up and down Prawl's backbone.

Though he seemed to be looking straight ahead of his nose, he kept his eyes wide open for everything about the camp. The warriors, tall and powerful men, all had magazine rifles, some Enfields, some Sharpes and Winchesters, and some Springfield Cavalry carbines. Most of them wore vicious coupsticks in their belts. From the tepee flaps the Sioux women watched him, one shawl over two heads. Most of them were middle-aged or old squaws, as shapeless as a bag of pemmican tied in the middle; but quite a few were young women, black-eyed, graceful, and attractive.

On every hand his experienced eyes saw the signs of lean times. The hungry-looking children, the gaunt dogs prowling around the camp, the old buffalo-leather tents—all spoke of poor hunting and short food supplies.

Much as Prawl hated to see hunger in any human community, he felt that the hunger in this camp would give Red Haley's daring idea a good chance of success.

When he came to Sitting Bull's tent, he found a dozen picked warriors blocking his way. He guessed they were the chief's bodyguard. One of them made a gesture to Prawl that he should surrender his belt-gun and carbine. Prawl laughed in his face. Remembering that Sitting Bull either couldn't or wouldn't talk English, he swept his eyes over the warrior and asked, "Who talks with white man's tongue?"

No one answered.

He made the sign that he wanted an interpreter. One was speedily brought, an old Yankton Sioux subchief. Prawl dismounted, and followed the subchief into the tepee.

Against the far wall of the tepee the Sioux chieftain was sitting on a white buffalo robe, a repeating Winchester beside him. He was a heavy-built, rather short man of nearly fifty, his swarthy face roundish, his nose bulbous, his dark, roving eyes remarkably brilliant. He wore no headdress, and his hair hung down across his chest in two thick braids. His quilled shirt was decorated on the right side with the figure of a red snake, on the left side with a black, rearing animal that resembled a moose. On his grimy right hand he was wearing a gold band ring with a small crest—the ring he had cut from the hand of the dead General Custer.

At his first glance, Prawl was struck by the driving power in Sitting Bull's face. The mere blink of the man's eyes carried authority. Not a little of his power lay in the sphinxlike solemnity he could assume. The only pleasant thing about him was his smile—the sullen corners of his mouth turned up, his eyes twinkled, and the hard lines of his face broke into a multitude of wrinkles.

At his gesture, Prawl crouched down a few feet in front of the chieftain. Looking directly into Sitting Bull's eyes, though his words were for the Yankton subchief, he went straight to the point of his visit.

"Many Eagles came to my tepee when the sun rose," he began, "and said that Sitting Bull and his warriors have formed a war lodge against the ten Chippewa families. I have seen with my own eyes that the Pointed-Skins are held prisoners here. That must not be. The laws of the Big Chief Woman forbid it."

The Yankton subchief interpreted. Prawl waited a minute to see how Sitting Bull would take the de-

mand. But the chieftain did not answer; not a muscle of his face moved. He simply kept his eyes fastened on the constable.

"This land," Prawl continued, striking the ground with his hand, "is the hunting territory of the Pointed-Skins. Sitting Bull and his warriors have no right to it, except what right the Pointed-Skins are willing to give them. Sitting Bull should have pitched his lodges somewhere else. But he can stay here if he releases the Pointed-Skins and allows them to leave."

When the speech had been translated, the Sioux chief sat for a moment, impassive, blinking his eyes slowly. Prawl expected him to start a harangue. But instead, the Sioux leaned forward slightly, his lips opened, and he spoke one flat, resounding English syllable:

"No!"

At the bullet-hard refusal, Prawl jerked a little, in spite of himself. The cold, hypnotic gaze of the chief made him uncomfortable. But he returned the stare.

"You must release the Pointed-Skins," he repeated, more brusquely. "You must give them back their ponies, their dogs, their weapons. They must be safely out of this camp before the noon sun peeps through the smoke hole of this tepee."

Sitting Bull did not argue. He simply leveled a finger at the flap-door of his lodge in a curt order for Prawl to get out—while the getting was good.

A hot anger jiggled through Prawl. He fought it down, knowing that anger would only provide the Sioux with an excuse to start something.

He could see with half an eye that not only did Sit-

ting Bull intend to blot out the little Chippewa band, but that he himself was in ugly danger. Riding into this Sioux camp had been like walking into a rattler's den. But he had anticipated trouble, and during the four-hour ride, he had thought out his strategy.

Paying no attention to Sitting Bull's order, he said, "When I go, the Pointed-Skins will go with me. Do you want Chief Milton to be told how you have treated them?"

"Your Chief Milton—*splaa!*" Sitting Bull grunted scornfully. "I am a chief of many warriors. Thunder is my relative. I say the Pointed-Skins will stay. They are dogs."

Prawl had heard those words before from Indian lips, and he understood them perfectly. When every other excuse for a base deed was lacking, the party upon whom the deed was perpetrated was simply a dog!

"In the Sioux camps there is hunger," Prawl said, in slow, curt words: "Few buffalo have come up across the land of gray chalk this summer. In the hungry camps of the other Sioux chieftains, like Pretty Bear and Spotted Cougar, there is much whispered grumbling against Sitting Bull. They are saying that he has led them into a barren land and is keeping them there—"

"You lie!" Sitting Bull broke in, in good round English. "Who is there that dares lift his voice against the medicine chief of all the Sioux?"

Prawl saw by the very vehemence of the denial that he had hit a touchy spot; Sitting Bull was not too sure of his power over the subchiefs.

"So I lie," he said, with a hard grin at the Sioux. "So

there is no rumbling against Sitting Bull in the hungry camps. Perhaps there is even no hunger. Perhaps those camps do not need the wagon train of food that Chief Milton is about to send to them."

He paused a moment, meeting the glittery black eyes of the Little Big Horn victor. "But those wagons of food," he went on, "will never come to the Sioux camps if the Chippewas of Many Eagles' band are killed here. What then will the other camps and the chiefs like Pretty Bear and Spotted Cougar say about Sitting Bull?"

The Sioux leaned forward. "Who will tell Chief Milton that the Chippewa dogs were killed?"

"I will!" Prawl said coolly.

The threat inflamed Sitting Bull. He reached for his Winchester and pointed it at the Mounted constable, his face twisting with anger.

"You will not live to see your Chief Milton again, *Sheemoginish*," he rasped. "You have raised your hand in a threat against me. You have promised you will speak an evil word against me. Good."

He called out an order. One by one, the dozen warriors outside came filing in and squatted around the walls of the lodge, rifles across their knees. Prawl did not move, or bat an eye. He realized that death was brushing against him. He knew that Sitting Bull had called in the other Indians so that they could see him murder one of the formidable *Sheemoginish*. But death had brushed him before, and he believed that he still held a strong card.

"You have said," Sitting Bull went on, in his cold, deadly tones, "that you will not go until the Pointed-

Skins go with you. You love the Pointed-Skins; they are your brothers. Good—you will stay with them, here in my camp. It is good that I should do the same to you as I shall do to your brothers. So Chief Milton's ears will go hungry. There will be no one to tell what happened to his warrior, the Lone Fire, or his friends, the Pointed-Skins."

Prawl merely stared at the chieftain and grinned his hard grin. For a long moment the tension hung, all eyes in the lodge upon the two of them. In the silence a vague, puzzled look crept into Sitting Bull's eyes. He seemed to be wondering how the white man could be so utterly unaffected by the threat of death.

Finally Prawl said, "Do you think I am guileless as a papoose on its mother's back? Do you think I would trust myself in the camp of Sitting Bull, who has killed many white men, and who has killed wantonly? Does not Chief Milton know where I went, and will he not know what has happened to me unless I return? Do you think that I did not send word to him before I rode off to the camp of Sitting Bull with Many Eagles?"

A dull-gray fear spread over Sitting Bull's coppery face. "You lie!" he growled. "Chief Milton does not know where you went. You did not see him."

Prawl shrugged. "I sent word to him by the Cree 'breed, Colquhuon. The 'breed came to me with a message when the sun rose, and by him I sent word back to Chief Milton. If I do not return, he will know that you have killed the Chippewas, and killed me. That is the word which I sent to him by the 'breed."

He shrugged again. "Of course you can kill me," he said. "There are twelve warriors in this lodge and three

hundred warriors outside, and I am a Lone Fire. You can tie rocks to me and throw me to the turtles in the lake. You can knock the brains out of the Pointed-Skin warriors and strangle their women. You are thirty men to their one. But if you lay hands on me or on my friends, the Chippewas, then the food wagons will not roll out of Chief Milton's post. Then the hungry camps of the other Sioux will not have food. And the moosebird will tell every Sioux why there is hunger in his lodge. The moosebird will say that it was because of Sitting Bull."

He saw the shock of uneasiness that went around the circle of warriors. He could see that his words had jolted Sitting Bull. But the man was angry and resentful, and his finger was on the trigger of the Winchester.

"No more food or ammunition to hunt game with," Prawl went on, "will Chief Milton ever give you. He will order you back across the Line, and will summon other Yellow-Stripes and soldiers of the *Shagalasha* to make you go. The Crees and Blackfeet are friends of the *Sheemoginish*; if you kill one of us, they too will dig up the avenging hatchet. The whole *Mela Haska* nation is your enemy now. If you make enemy of the *Shagalasha* too, then you will have no place on earth to pitch your tepee.

"It would be a papoose's foolishness to pull destruction down upon yourself for no reason at all. A wise chief will let the Pointed-Skins go in peace."

A ripple of the approving "Howl" ran around the circle of men. Prawl could see the Sioux chieftain slowly wilting. In a minute or two the muzzle of the Winchester lowered. With a leap of his heart, Prawl realized

that he had won this grim little game. He had saved not only his own life, but the lives of the Chippewa men, women, and children.

"Well," he demanded, "do I go—and the Chippewas with me? Or do I stay here?"

To cover up his submission as gracefully as possible, the chief launched into a long harangue, cataloging the miseries that he had received at the hands of the *Mela Haska*; and bemoaning the Big Chief Woman's edict that the Sioux would be given no land in Canada.

Prawl listened for a little while, contemptuously. The change from a haughty, murderous-minded chief to a self-pitying innocent was so blatant that even some of the Sioux warriors looked ashamed.

Finally he cut Sitting Bull's oration short with a gesture and stood up. Ignoring the chief's offer to shake hands, he said, "If any of your men ride after the Chippewas and try to ambush them, I will know about it, and Chief Milton will hear of it," and he strode out of the tent.

Outside, he ordered Many Eagles, "Get your tepees down, gather your ponies, and be ready to leave here in twenty minutes. I'll ride along with you a few miles. A Sioux promise isn't worth a bodewash chip, and Sitting Bull's promise is worth even less."

He sat on his mare by the lake edge while the Chippewa lodges came down and the little band he had saved got together. Then, at their head, he rode out of the Sioux camp.

Four miles to the east he stopped on a swell and beckoned Many Eagles up beside him.

"Here our trails fork. I go to the south. I can watch

over you no longer. You must ride east all day and all night. You must thereafter keep a safe distance from the Sioux."

"But to the east," Many Eagles objected, "there is no buffalo. To the south—"

"My orders!" Prawl cut him short. "If you go south and the Sioux capture you again, I will not be around to haul you out of the fire." He swallowed hard, remembering his note to Inspector Milton—the note which had burned his bridges, irrevocably now. "In less suns than you have fingers on one hand I will not be a *Sheemoginish* at all, but will be riding a lone trail, down in the *Mela Haska* land."

3

Feeling miserable in spite of his lone-handed victory over the formidable Sioux chief, Prawl headed southwest toward the place that Red Haley had indicated on the chart. It was off his regular patrol trail, but he had been there several times and knew the route well.

He pushed the mare along at a good clip. But the miles were slow and toilsome. To avoid being sighted, he kept to the timber belts as much as he could, and this made the trip longer and harder. The timber was mostly second growth, where he had to plow through buckbrush, briars, and sapling windfall. Time and again he had to detour around some scouting party or hide while one passed him.

Sundown found him still ten miles from his goal, tired, hungry, and saddle-cramped. But still he pushed on. Then darkness came, with no moon, and he had to stop.

He camped in a prairillon where there was sweet grass for the mare and a small alkali pond for water. As he beat through the niggerhead around the pond in hopes of finding a turtle, he plumped into a brood of mallards almost big enough to fly. They exploded under his feet and scattered in a dozen directions, with a *quawk* that nearly knocked him over.

The flags were shoulder-high, the water knee-deep, the marsh dark and forbidding, but he had distributed most of his food to the Chippewa youngsters and was ravenously hungry. With a willow club he grimly started after the ducks—splashing, slipping, sprawling full length at times when he ran into potholes.

When he emerged from the niggerhead twenty minutes later, he was soaking wet and plastered with mud, but he had two tender young mallards in his sack.

At a small fire, sunk deep in the sod so that the Sioux could not see it, he dried his clothes and broiled the ducks. He ate one, wrapped the other in leaves for reference the next day, and went to sleep early.

At the first glint of gray the next morning, he was up and in the saddle. The remaining five miles he covered in an hour.

A little before sunrise he rode up a long slope covered with lodgepole timber, and stopped just below the crest. Habitually cautious when Indians were around, he dismounted in a clump of vines and windfall and picketed the mare securely.

"Better lay low and keep quiet, Molly m'lady," he cautioned. "No whinnying at any Indian shaganappi. If the Sioux catch us here, they'll stick us as full of

spears as a pincushion is full of needles." And keeping screened from sight, he crept up to the ridge-line.

Below him lay a long valley, stretching south across the Border. Its slopes on each side were steep and gutted with washouts; and at the top of the slopes a rim-rock hemmed the valley in. Since the last time he had seen it, the appearance of the valley had changed radically. A prairie fire had swept down through it, destroying the timber and the buckbrush as far as he could see. Indian work, he guessed, to drive game. The valley was clothed now with sedge grass, whipping in the northeast breeze, and with stirrup-high shrubbery, brown and dry. A little stream wound down the valley center, widening here and there into ponds and small green prairillons.

In one of these meadows, about two-thirds of a mile away, a herd of two thousand buffaloes were pasturing on the aromatic bunch grass. They were headed north toward him. Several dozen bulls were crossing the brown strip to the next green patch, while a small band of cows and calves had fallen a quarter mile behind the main drove.

The size of the herd, the direction they were taking, and the conspicuous white yearling bull in their midst left no doubt on earth that this was the herd that Red Haley had written about. In fact, buffaloes were so scarce in this region that there could hardly be any other herd within three hundred miles.

Moving slowly, they were heading for a swamp country to the north where they could find green pasture in the muskeg flats. They had come scarcely twenty miles since Haley wrote about them. A huge

flock of "coffee-heads" accompanied the herd, perching on the backs of the shaggy animals and flying around them incessantly. Above the herd, not three hundred yards from Prawl, were five white-tailed antelope.

As he lay behind a screen of brush and watched, Prawl realized that he would have only one chance at carrying out his part of the plan, and would therefore have to make good on his first try. While the herd was a little large for one man to handle, it was not spread out, but compact and manageable. He believed that his simplest course was to gallop down the slope straight at the buffaloes, shooting, waving his saddle blanket, and yelling. In all likelihood, this would stampede the lead bulls back into the main herd; the herd would be thrown into a panic, and the whole drove would go thundering down the valley.

If he rode their tails hard and kept up the scare, he could have them across the Border in less than two hours—safely out of Sioux reach. Neither wild buffaloes nor wild horses could draw the American Sioux back across that fateful line. And down there, Red Haley and two fellow conspirators from the Cavalry troop would take the herd over and whoop it on south.

He was just on the point of starting his campaign when a little incident down the valley caught his eye.

Near a patch of shrubbery at the lower end of the herd, eight cows and their calves snorted suddenly in alarm, ran a hundred yards up the valley, then stopped, whirled around and looked back, as though making up their slow minds whether or not to be scared. Nothing happened, and in a few minutes they started pasturing again.

Prawl wondered what had scared them. If they had seen or winded a predatory animal, a wolf or a puma, the cows would have bunched together and stood their ground instead of running as they did. That was buffalo nature.

With a strong hunch that something was wrong, he bellied out along the ridge-line till he had a good view of the shrubbery patch that the cows had shied at, and got out his Service binoculars.

He had scarcely brought the patch into clear focus when he tensed and swore beneath his breath— Just inside the thicket five Indians lay motionless, watching the buffaloes.

What tribe they belonged to he could not make out for sure, at that distance; he merely could see that all five were strapping big warriors armed with rifles. But he guessed that they were Sioux. Probably they had been out scouting for game and had spotted the buffaloes in the valley.

He wondered if they had seen him. Likely not, or they would have inched back to better cover.

It was clear enough why they were lying low and watching the buffaloes. By themselves the five could not hope to kill more than a few dozen of the animals. Their strategy was to let the herd work north, maybe nudging it little by little, with infinite patience and caution, toward a swamp country known as the *Eaux Mortes* or Dead Waters. In that maze of muskeg and boggy streams, a hundred warriors, summoned from the camps, could slaughter the herd to the last hoof.

Those two thousand buffaloes were of supreme importance to the Sioux. If the Indians got them, they

could defy the governments on both sides of the Border. If they failed to get them, they would have to make peace. The camps even then, in summertime, were sadly in need of meat. By fall, and throughout the coming winter, they would need food desperately. But not if they got these two thousand buffaloes. Besides giving them a bountiful stock of meat, the herd would supply them with new robes, clothes, tepees, and the hundred small articles which they made from the animal.

"But how the blazes," Prawl swore, "can I turn those buffaloes now? The minute I show myself and try to stampede that herd, those Sioux will jump out of cover and try to do the same. They'd drive the buffaloes past me and on north in spite of all I could do. And they'd shoot me in the bargain. Against the five of 'em, I wouldn't have a chance."

For half an hour he lay there watching the Sioux and wrestling with the problem of how to stampede the buffaloes down the valley and across the Border. In spite of the danger to himself, he could not give up the idea. It was too tremendous an opportunity to make the Sioux give in, and stop the bloodshed and chaos of that whole country.

Finally he decided on a plan. It was a doubtful, dangerous business, but it was the only scheme he could think of.

After studying the stiff northeast breeze and the lay of the valley, he backed down from the ridge-line to a point a hundred feet below the crest, gathered a handful of dry grass and kindled it, and then scattered it in a line along the slope. Working feverishly, he scattered

other patches of fire out along the hillside until he had a fire line five hundred feet long—crackling, gathering speed before the breeze, and moving up toward the crest of the ridge.

His mare, frightened by the flames, had started rearing and struggling. He raced back and quieted her, then seized his rifle and hurried up the ridge-line to watch.

The fire was still out of sight of the buffaloes. The lead bulls kept throwing their huge heads up, sniffing the air and rumbling, but they did not bolt. The five Sioux had stood up in the thicket and were looking at the smoke with amazed eyes. Plainly the fire had caught them by surprise. They could not figure it out, or get their wits together and try to counteract it.

Gathering speed, the fire rolled up the slope toward the crest. There the stiff breeze caught it squarely. The crackling swelled to an ominous roar; the flames seemed suddenly to leap to life in the dry sedge, and long yellow tongues began jumping ahead. In a solid wall the fire swept over the ridge and rolled down the valley with near-hurricane speed and force.

For a minute or two the buffalo herd stared stupidly at the onrushing fire. Then the drove began to mill around. The lead bulls bellowed and pawed the ground. The calves stood hunched against the cows, and the cloud of "coffee-heads" took to the air, wheeling and chortling in panic.

Then the wind flung a festoon of smoke down into the herd itself, and as one animal, they whirled and, with a flip of two thousand tails, were off down the valley, thundering ahead of the yellow prairie fiend.

Fascinated, Prawl watched the mighty spectacle.

The green patches of muskeg quivered like huge bowls of jelly as the herd plunged across them. Echoing from bluff to bluff, the roar of their stampede filled the whole valley. But fast as the buffaloes went, the five antelopes sailed around them like white-rumped birds. With a shrill clamor, the cloud of "coffee-heads" rose high in the air, above the smoke and heat, and went sweeping down the valley with the stampede.

The five Indians sprang from their cover and tried to halt the mad charge. But Sitting Bull and all his warriors could not have stopped that wild run. The Sioux were in danger of being engulfed and killed. Barely in time they made it to a deep washout where they had tethered their ponies, leaped on their mounts, galloped out of the path, and let the herd thunder past.

Prawl paid little attention to the Indians just then. He was watching that herd. Swerving neither to right nor left, it tore straight on down the valley for the Border. A few of the younger calves and weaker cows dropped behind, but only a few. In a dark, wavelike mass the herd thundered on and on. Slowly the roar of them died away. Then the smoke from the green muskeg patches hid them from view. But they were still running at top speed, and Prawl knew that they would run their panic out before they stopped. They would roll on and on down the valley and across the Border and miles beyond the Border, where Haley and the two troopers could pick them up and whoop them still farther south.

A grim triumph ran through Prawl like an exultation. He rubbed his singed face and swore. "There goes your stinking supply of meat, Sitting Bull! Now maybe you'll

listen to reason. Or if you don't, the other Sioux chiefs will!"

Then the realization of his own danger came home to him. He backed down from the ridge-line and ran toward his horse.

"We'd better beat it away from here, Molly m'lady," he jerked out, unpicketing her and springing into the saddle. "Those five Sioux will swing around this way to see what the devil started that fire, and if we don't put our foot in front of our nose and git, they'll shoot us colder than a dead dog's nose."

4

Knowing that he would be pursued, Prawl headed straight east in order to get to good horseback country as quickly as possible. Given half a chance, the mare could outrun the grass-fed ponies in a long endurance chase, but in hill country or swampland the Sioux could fan out and bring him to bay.

As the mare settled into a swift, steady gallop and the valley slowly receded, Prawl kept turning in the saddle and looking back. His common sense told him that the five Sioux were on his trail and would cling to it vengefully. But he could see nothing of them, and he grew more and more confident that the mare would outrun their shaganappi.

He felt proud of the work he had done in the last twenty-four hours. He had ridden into Sitting Bull's camp alone, told the chieftain exactly what to do, and with a poker-faced lie had bluffed him into doing it. Lone-handed still, he had just turned a trick which might force the Sioux to return to the States that fall,

or, at the least, would give the Canadian authorities the power to make them stop raiding and killing as they had been doing. With the two thousand buffaloes in their possession, they could have gone into winter camp north of the Border and thumbed their noses at the Mounted Police and Cavalry alike. But without that herd they were dependent on those food wagons. Already there was unrest and a whisper of rebellion among the other Sioux chieftains. Sitting Bull had been telling them over and over, "When the buffaloes come north—" and had quieted the rebellion with the promise of rich hunting. Now Sitting Bull would have to sing a different song.

He wondered what Inspector Milton would say if the officer knew about his turning the herd of buffaloes back south. "Milton can go to the devil," he growled beneath his breath. "He'd probably have me court-martialed for doing something without orders. That's how things happen to a fellow when he's on the bamboo slide."

On the crest of a hill eight miles from the valley, he wheeled the mare around and looked back over his trail. No Sioux horsemen. With his glasses he watched the deerbush swell three miles west, which he had ridden across. He did not have long to wait. Over the swell came the five Sioux, riding breakneck and flung out in a line, as a pack of well-trained hounds will trail.

To the east the hills were fewer now and the grassy stretches between them were broader and nearly free of brush. Three miles ahead, and just to the north of Prawl's route, stood a clay knob, crowned with wind-gnarled pines. A mile south of it, another knob rose up.

He decided to cut in between the two hills, taking his chances on their having lookout parties on them, rather than swing around them in the brushy marsh country on either side.

When he looked back the next time, he noticed that the five Sioux had stopped on top of a swell. This seemed queer; he wondered what they were up to. Out of his experience with the Plains tribes, he knew it was safest to be sure of nothing where an Indian was concerned, and always to be on the lookout for tricks.

Uneasy, he reined the mare in, stopped, and focused his glasses on the five.

As he watched them, he caught a tiny bright glint. For a moment he thought it was the sun glistening on some silver ornament of saddle or bridle. But then the glint flashed again—a second, third, and fourth time.

He turned and pointed the glasses at the north clay knob. A jolt went through him as he picked up an answering flash from the storm-gnarled pines. Mirror signals! As he had feared, there *was* a scouting party on that knob. They were squarely in his path, and his five pursuers had flashed them a message to head him off. He knew this as well as he knew his own name.

"Heavens above, Molly," he breathed, "they've got us boxed. We'll have to swing north of that knob through the rough country. We probably can outrun the five behind us, but those on the knob can cut straight across our path. Molly, you've got to beat 'em, somehow."

He wheeled north, leaned forward in the saddle and spoke a few sharp words to the mare. She responded with a splendid burst of speed. If any horse could have

carried him out of that trap, Molly would have done it. If she had had level ground in front of her nose, she would have brought him through, even though the Indians were cutting across the short angle. But she had to travel two miles to their one, and the going was slow and rough.

From the north clay knob he saw four Sioux gallop out upon the level and start to head him off. He thought of swinging south of the twin hills, but then he remembered the watery low country there and rejected the idea. Even to the north the country was bad enough. Between the north clay knob and a small *Eaux Mortes* region to the north there was a narrow passageway of only four miles. He had to get through that, or—

Long before he was abreast of the clay knob, he saw that he could never get through that passageway. The four Sioux, diagonaling across, were drawing swiftly within rifle range. He whirled in the saddle and looked back. His five pursuers, cutting across his long swing, were also closing in. Between the two of them he was pinned against the impassable *Eaux Mortes*.

Rather than plunge into that soup-thin muskeg, where the Sioux could shoot him like some floundering animal, he decided to hole in and have it out with the two parties at rifle point.

Reining the mare up short, he rose in the stirrups and looked around. A dozen rods to the right he saw a sink-in, a deep little pocket. It was not much of a shelter, but nothing better was in sight. Making up his mind quickly, he cantered across to it and led the mare down into the cup-shaped depression.

"Down, Molly m'lady," he said, as the mare looked

at him quizzically. "Down, girl. You've done your level best, and a good best it was. The rest is up to me."

At his order the mare lay down as obediently as a dog. Prawl ran his hand along his cartridge belt, shook the saddle-stiffness out of his frame, and looked around his little shelter.

A small, diamond-shaped sink-in, it was about twenty feet long, twelve feet wide, and shoulder deep.

Cautiously he raised his head and looked for his enemies. The party of four had already come up within six hundred yards, and were riding around him in a circle, flat on their ponies. Presently they were joined by the five others, and he had nine rifle-armed Sioux circling him, yelling, and occasionally sending a harmless bullet in his direction.

He hoped they would edge in closer, but they did not. He would have given his ears for a long-barreled Winchester. His Snider carbine was good enough at three hundred yards, but at six hundred it was no match for the guns of the Indians.

Nevertheless, he tried with it. Judging elevation carefully, he took a long aim and fired three shots at the nearest Sioux. At the first spurt of fire the Indian ducked out of danger on the far side of his pony. At the third the pony stumbled and fell dead, shot through the heart.

From the cover of its body, the Indian poured five wrathful bullets at Prawl, and the other eight emptied their rifles at him. But he had popped down like a gopher into its hole and the bullets whined harmlessly overhead.

The Sioux stopped yelling and a silence fell. Prawl

lifted his head cautiously over the bank to see what his enemies were up to now.

They had dismounted and were starting to come in at him. Not openly, in a rush, but in the Indian way of slipping up.

They hardly had cover enough out there to shield a rabbit; but as they wriggled toward him, bellying over the matted grass and hiding behind clumps of yellow prairie flowers, he could not have made them out without his binoculars.

He waited until the nearest Indian, a subchief of some sort, was within four hundred yards of his shelter. Taking careful aim, he shot twice. One of his bullets struck. The Sioux scrambled to his feet, tried to run, but collapsed within a few feet.

The other eight changed their minds about sneaking up on the lone, grim redjacket in the little sink-in. One by one, they started backing off—crawling over the grass and through the flowers till they were at a safe distance.

The wounded Indian, four hundred yards away, was futilely trying to get back out of rifle range. It seemed he had been shot through the hip. Plainly he was in great pain, but he endured it silently. Watching, Prawl was stirred to pity, enemy or no enemy. Keeping the best watch he could on the other eight Sioux, he stood up in plain view and jerked his arms back and forth, with palms extended.

The Sioux recognized the truce signal. They half-rose, their rifle butts resting on the ground. When Prawl saw this, he made signs that two of them should come in, get their wounded man, and carry him back

where they could look after him. Then he laid his Snider on the ground and folded his arms.

Not one of the eight moved. They simply stood in their tracks, staring at him, and waited, plainly believing that he was trying to lure them within range.

He picked up his carbine and leveled it at the wounded Indian, as a threat that if they did not come and get the man, he would kill the Sioux himself. The Indians seemed to understand his gestures if not his words. When he laid his Snider on the ground again, two of them came loping in, carried the wounded sub-chief back out of range, and deposited him on the prairie about eight hundred yards away. But they did not dress his wound or pay any further attention to him.

Then, as a token that the truce was over, one of them whipped up his rifle and shot at Prawl.

Sitting on their horses, they held a powwow. Prawl watched them uneasily. The Indian whom he had unhorsed was standing in the middle of the half-circle, looking up at the other seven and gesticulating as he talked. Prawl reached for his glasses and drew the powwow up close, studying the gestures of the Indian intently.

Little by little, he pieced their plan together, and his face paled as their purpose dawned on him. He turned to Molly.

"They're going to try to burn us out of here, girl. And they can do it, too, unless we do something and fast. That mat of grass is dry as tinder and this wind is strong enough to fan it into a pipper. It won't last long, that fire—but neither will we."

Working swiftly, he reached out and gathered a handful of dry grass, wadded it into a ball, tied it together with a long string of rawhide, and then set it afire. With one eye on the Sioux, he leaped out of the sink-in and raced out in the direction of the wind fifty or sixty feet. The Indians saw him, realized instantly what he was doing, and swung in toward him on their ponies, shooting on the jump. Prawl tried hard not to pay any attention, or even look at them. Dragging the burning ball across the matted grass, he laid down a line of fire a hundred feet long in front of his shelter, before the wad of grass burned out. Bullets were kicking into the sod around him as he finished. Dodging and zigzagging, he raced back to cover, slid into the hole untouched, grabbed up his Snider and drove the Sioux back out of range with a hot little burst.

At a dozen points along his hundred-foot line his fire was catching slowly. The spots burned together until they formed a solid front and the fire line came surging toward him, fanned by the stiff breeze.

By the time the Indians had started their fire, his own had burned halfway to the sink-in. In the short space of fifty feet it would not get up much smoke or heat. As it crept up toward the hole, he crouched down beside Molly, holding her firmly and quieting her instinctive dread.

In less than five minutes his backfire had reached the hole, split to each side of it, crept around it and swept on south, leaving a wedge of unburned grass on the windward side of his cover. He burned this wedge also, to have a clean strip all around.

Meanwhile, the Sioux had gone back three-quarters

of a mile and started a fire line with a half-mile front. Pushed along by the strong wind, their fire rose higher and higher as it came toward him. Prawl could only watch it, helpless, with a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach. Against a wall of fire like that, his fifty or sixty feet was a pitifully scant protection. It might save him and it might not.

Gathering speed and fierceness, the fire rolled on and on, nearer. Blackbirds, meadowlarks, and sparrows flushed ahead of the flames and came darting over him, with shrill, piping cries of terror. Curlews and upland plovers rose from the prairie and zoomed straight up out of sight. A kit fox, a coyote, and half a dozen cottontails went clipping past.

The next instant the wall of fire was upon Prawl. For a little time he felt as though he were being roasted alive. Fighting for breath and battling the frenzied horse, he was blanketed and blinded by the smoke, stinging sparks, and scorching heat.

Mercifully, the black minute was soon over with. The fire split on either side of his protecting swath, the wind whipped it past him, and it went rolling away south across the prairie.

He managed to quiet the horse again, and picketed her as best he could to a rock. With a dozen smarting burns on his face and hands, he picked up his Snider and peered out through the lingering smoke for a glimpse of his enemies.

They were dashing back and forth, about four hundred yards away, trying to see what had happened to him.

"All right, I'll show you what!" he snarled, and laid his carbine against his cheek.

His hot burst toppled one of the Indians from his pony, dead before he touched the ground. The others scattered like demons in the wispy smoke. Prawl kept jerking his head around, watching in every direction; but he saw nothing more of his enemies till gradually the last smoldering clumps of grass burned out and the wind whipped the smoke entirely away.

Then, about a thousand yards to the south of his shelter, he saw that they were holding another powwow. Again he studied them intently with his binoculars, trying to see what they were cooking up this time. But he could not tell.

After nearly half an hour of powwowing, four of them galloped off toward the north clay knob, leaving the unhorsed Sioux and two others to snipe at him and keep him confined to the sink-in. For a little while he thought they were going to summon help, but as the four rode up the hillside to the first trees and set to work, he quickly realized what their new scheme was.

With their belt-axes they chopped down a dozen pines, trimmed the trunks roughly to ten-foot lengths, hitched their ponies to the timbers, and snaked them out across the level toward his sink-in. At a safe distance they stopped and began their final preparations.

Silent, Prawl watched, the cold fingers of fear closing around his heart. There was no backfiring this time; no way of spiking this plan against him.

With tomahawks and leather thongs the Sioux fashioned a heavy, doorlike barricade three feet high, sev-

eral feet wide, and three poles thick. Two runners, adzed roughly flat on the bottomside, were put under it so that it could be pushed forward, and a prop behind kept it from falling backward.

When the contraption was ready, the four Sioux got behind it and started pushing. The barricade began to move forward, as steadily and irresistibly as the hand of Fate.

Prawl watched it in grim and helpless silence. He knew that the Sioux intended to push it right up to the edge of the sink-in and shoot him at point-blank range. The ten or twelve inches of tough green timber would be absolutely impervious to his rifle bullets. On the other side of him, eight hundred yards away, the three other Sioux were on guard against his making any break.

Yard by slow yard the barricade came on. When it was two hundred and fifty yards away, Prawl began shooting at it, searching for some chink or weak place where he could drive a bullet through. Again and again he emptied his clip into the thing. But he might as well have been throwing his lead against a rock bluff.

He stopped shooting, and again the silence fell. The three Sioux on the other side of him had broken off their yelling, and those behind the barricade were quiet, intent only on their work.

With a hard, twisted grin on his lips, Prawl laid his carbine aside and pulled out his heavy Enfield revolver. It would be a faster and better weapon for the face-to-face battle when the Sioux would leap from behind that barricade and jump down upon him. He took off his cumbersome cartridge belt; there would be no

time for any reloading. He untethered the mare and fondled her ears a moment.

"Molly," he said, "don't you let 'em make a shaganappi out of you. When the last shooting starts, you make a break away from here. You've got a good chance; they'll be plumb busy with me."

Lying flat against the sloping bank, he kicked a firm toehold in the ground and waited for the Sioux.

Overhead, a golden eagle hung motionless against the sky, so high that Prawl could barely catch its screaming *chak-chak-chak*. Three feet in front of him a little field mouse thrust its wiggling nose out of a hole and fearfully inspected the blackened sod. A prairie lark came flying back to its destroyed home, perched on an old buffalo skull, and sang disconsolately. A flock of magpies, their long tails awkward in the stiff breeze, beat heavily over him and flew on to the north clay knob. They alighted for a minute or two in a storm-gnarled pine. Then, suddenly frightened at something there in the timber, they let out a *quawk* of alarm and wheeled on south, gabbling and chortling.

Prawl wondered what had frightened them. Then he wondered why he should be wondering at so trivial a thing, when death was slowly creeping toward him.

In the taut silence he suddenly heard a yelp from the wounded subchief—a high-pitched and piercing yell. He jerked his head around and saw that the Indian had risen to his knees and was gesticulating at the other Sioux. Then the three dismounted Sioux sprang to their feet and darted to their ponies. In bewilderment, Prawl saw them leap on their ponies and head west at break-neck speed.

"What the c-c-consternation?" he breathed. "What the devil is happening now?"

The barricade abruptly halted. The four Sioux behind it started yelling and running—running at a half-crouch toward their own mounts.

With astonished eyes, Prawl saw a close-riding band of Indians break out of the buckbrush at the foot of the north clay knob and come tearing across the level toward him, lashing their ponies, waving their rifles and yelling like fiends.

"Great Jerusalem!" the thought jiggled across his mind. "Fourteen more Smokies!" The sudden turn of events left him a little stunned and he could not think clearly. "Fourteen more of 'em—as if I didn't have enough to argue with already!"

Then it dawned on him that the fourteen newcomers must be enemies of the Sioux and that the Sioux were fleeing from them in panic. He thought, Fourteen—why, why that's the same number as in Many Eagles' band! Why, they must have disobeyed me and swung down in this direction!

With yells and rifle shots, the fourteen Chippewas came spanking across the level prairie. Half a dozen of them broke away and took after the four dismounted Sioux. One of them angled off toward the wounded subchief, and Prawl heard a single rifle shot. Several of them started to veer in the direction of the three Sioux who had sped away on their ponies, but they soon saw that the chase was hopeless and galloped back to the rest of the Chippewa band.

In a daze, Prawl climbed out of his little sink-in and watched. The battle between the six mounted

Chippewas and the four Sioux afoot was hot and fierce, but short. There was a minute or two of rifle-talk at deadly range, then silence.

Trying to appear totally unconcerned, as a good Policeman should, Prawl buckled his cartridge belt on, caught up his rifle, led the mare out of the hole, and was waiting for the Chippewas when they rode up.

Many Eagles slipped off his horse and started explaining. His lodges, he said, were pitched four miles east of the north clay knob. He had seen the smoke of the prairie fire and had ridden up the knob to see the cause. Looking down from the wooded hill, he had seen the sorrel horse, seen one man fighting the eight Sioux, and had known that it was the Lone Fire. So— He finished with a grunt and a shrug of his shoulders.

Prawl tried hard to frown and look severe. "I thought I ordered you to high-tail it east, out of range of the Sioux," he said sternly. "It was plain luck that you didn't run into a big scouting party and find yourself in the Sioux cooking pot again. But I'll—this time I'll overlook it. You get your band and ride northeast with me to Métis River. You'll be pretty safe from there on."

Many Eagles looked down at the ground and scraped the blackened sod with his moccasin. "The Lone Fire *Sheemoginish* speaks with a wise tongue," he said. "After this fight with the Sioux, it is well that the Chippewas should do as the Lone Fire says."

"Good," Prawl answered. He allowed himself to unbend a little and offered his hand to the Chippewa leader. "You have proved yourself a true friend of the *Shemoginish*. They do not forget their friends."

He took a last look at the barricade and the little sink-in where he had awaited death, and then slowly climbed into the saddle.

5

It was dusk of the next day when Prawl reached the cabin on Lone Sioux. He was hungry and fagged out, and tormented with doubt as to what his next step should be. After giving Molly an extra-generous feeding of oats and picketing her behind the cabin, he trudged inside, swallowed a few bites of food himself, and lay down on his bunk, too tired to take off his clothes.

But for all his tiredness, he lay sleepless a couple of hours, tossing and thinking. The clean and simple thing to do was to ride south across the Border forthwith. The note that he had sent to Inspector Milton was insubordination of a kind that the officer could not and would not overlook.

But he felt that he had several loose ends to tuck in before he could cross that Border. He wanted to locate the hideout of two Assiniboin horse thieves who had been causing trouble in a district over to the east. On Métis River there was a half-breed family, a woman and eight children, who had lost father and husband and who had to be taken in to a *métis* settlement. And then, Many Eagles and the little band of Chippewas simply had to be freed of the unjust cattle-thieving charges against them. This obligation weighed the heaviest of all on his mind, after the way the Chippeawas had saved him from the Sioux scouting party.

He thought, "A few days more, just long enough to clean those matters up—it won't make much difference to me. I'll clean 'em up and go then."

But it was nearly two weeks later—two weeks and a three-hundred-mile swing around the prairie—before he got back to the cabin. There he found a note from Inspector Milton pinned to the wall, asking him to come in to headquarters immediately. There was another note, from Sergeant Larett, in Dave's warm, friendly tone, threatening him with dire physical consequences if he didn't drop everything and get in to headquarters on the *qui vive*.

"All right, we're riding to headquarters, Molly m'lady," he said, as he strapped his slender belongings behind the saddle and swung up. "We've got to deliver our report about the horse thieves. And that evidence which will clear Many Eagles and the Chippewas of the cattle-stealing charges—I'm going to cram it right down Milton's throat! The worst he can do is stick me in the Police butter-tub. But I don't think he'll do that. I think he'll just jerk his thumb at the Border and tell me to *git*."

When he reached Sergeant Larett's detachment post on Gopher River, he learned that Dave had gone to headquarters yesterday, leaving word for him to follow. From the men there, he learned that Dave Larett was being promoted to an inspectorship and was to be sent north to a new Saskatchewan post as Officer Commanding. He was immensely glad of Dave's good fortune, but the news left him with a lonely ache, as he

rode on toward headquarters. Dave Larett had been his only real friend in the whole outfit, and now Dave would be hundreds of miles away.

"But I guess it don't matter any, Molly," he said. "When you've got to walk out of a door and never come back, it don't matter much what you leave behind."

A few miles from headquarters he met up with a Mounted constable who was returning from a routine patrol. The constable gave him some surprising news as they rode on in together. Trouble was breaking out among the Sioux leaders, the constable said. Rumor had it that Pretty Bear and Spotted Cougar had definitely decided to return south of the Border, and several other subchiefs were of a mind to follow them. A liaison party of Yank Cavalry had come up three days ago to dicker with the Sioux and talk things over with Inspector Milton. Every one of the Sioux camps, the constable said, was in a restless, ugly mood, and no one really knew which way the cat would hop.

The news made Prawl shiver and sweat. Without being told, he knew that the loss of the buffalo herd had precipitated this smoldering trouble. He wondered if Inspector Milton knew about the part he had played in that buffalo business, and also if Red Haley's commanding officer knew about Haley's part. The loss of the buffalo herd might send the unpredictable Sioux back across the Border, but just as easily it could stir up a hornet's nest and bring on another Little Big Horn.

At headquarters post, the lodges of half a dozen Sioux subchiefs were pitched to the east of the quadrangle. On the west side stood five large tents of the

Yankee Cavalry party. Behind one of these Prawl caught sight of a familiar, rawboned, redheaded figure industriously washing shirts and socks at a wooden tub, and he thought, "Well, Red hasn't been put in the jug *yet*. Maybe they don't know about the trick he and I pulled with those buffaloes."

As he started to dismount at the side door of the barracks, a corporal came out and told him that Sergeant Larett and Inspector Milton wanted to see him the minute he came in. "They're over in Milton's cabin," the constable added. "There's a little lull right now in their negotiations with the Yankees and the Sioux, and you'd better hurry right over."

Prawl rode across to the officer's cabin, dismounted, knocked at the door, and went in.

Dave Larett and Inspector Milton were seated at the officer's work table, with papers and reports spread out all around them. Both looked up.

Sergeant Larett said, "Why, hello, Bing; where the devil have you been?"

Inspector Milton nodded and smiled as he returned Prawl's salute, and said, "I'm glad to see you, Constable." He added drily, "Won't you sit down? I understand that you've been doing a lot of riding in the last couple of weeks."

Awkwardly Prawl took a chair and laid his Stetson on the floor. The friendliness of Inspector Milton's tone puzzled him. He had never had much friendliness from the officer; now, after that exchange of notes, he could not imagine why Milton was speaking to him in accents of kindness.

Inspector Milton eyed him for a moment. "I won't

beat around the bush, Constable," he said. "We know about your stampeding that buffalo herd across the Border and about Trooper Haley's taking them on south. Naturally the Sioux know about it, too. In fact, everybody knows about it." He drummed on the desk and lowered his voice. "Privately I think it was a good idea. It brought these Sioux face to face with hunger, and they're listening to what we tell them. But officially, of course, I have to disavow your act. Likewise, the Yankee Cavalry captain has had to disavow Haley's part in it. Officially I have had to assure the Sioux that you would be given severe punishment."

He paused again. Prawl turned red and squirmed. Then the officer went on:

"Of course, I didn't have to tell the Sioux that I was going to suspend your punishment. But that's what I'm going to do. Also, I'm going to transfer you entirely out of this country. After that buffalo trick, if one of these Sioux scouting parties should ever meet up with you out on the prairie, I'm sure you'd never get back to the post. For another thing—well, to be plain about it, you've been off on the wrong foot in this Division, Prawl, and maybe a clean start somewhere else will change the picture for you. I hope so. I'm detaching you from my command and assigning you to Sergeant—I mean, *Inspector*—David Larett here. As you may have heard, he's being sent north to establish a post in upper Saskatchewan, and I thought you might like to go with him."

Prawl fidgeted and swallowed hard. "Why—uh," he stammered, "that's very decent of you, sir. I know I've been a square peg in a round hole around here. I know

you people expected me to desert, and if I'd been decent about it, that's what I would have done long ago. But somehow I couldn't—I just couldn't. It's darned fine of you not to jug me for pulling that buffalo trick on the Sioux. I fully expected, after that lousy note I wrote you—”

Dave Larett started a little. Under the table he reached out with his boot and gave Prawl a kick on the shins. Prawl did not understand. He merely knew that he had said something all wrong.

Inspector Milton frowned in a puzzled way. “What lousy note? Why, that answer of yours to my somewhat blunt reprimand was quite nice. In fact”—he smiled a little—“that note of yours was the only respectful report I ever remember receiving from you, Prawl. It was the thing that started me to thinking that perhaps I'd been judging you too harshly.”

Prawl opened his mouth and started to say that he didn't know what the inspector was talking about. But just then Dave Larett reached out and kicked him a second time—so hard that Prawl winced and grunted. He looked at Larett and at Milton, and finally the truth dawned upon him: Milton had never received that defiant and insubordinate note. Dave Larett had intercepted it. And not only that, but Larett had written another note and sent it on to Milton. *That* was why the inspector had called it “a nice note.” That was why the officer was now looking at him in a different light—and why Dave Larett was kicking his shins off under the table.

“Since you're under my command now, Constable,” Dave Larett growled at him, “I have to advise you that

you're under arrest until further notice. Put your horse away and get something to eat, and then go and get into jail. If you meet any of those Sioux outside, you'd better give them a wide berth. When I get through here, I'll talk to you, down at the butter-tub, and get your report on these last two weeks. Until my detachment starts north, you will remain in the butter-tub. If it's true that no one can get out of there, it's also true that none of these Sioux can get in there and get at you."

In a sort of daze, Prawl walked out of Inspector Milton's cabin and stood there a moment, blinking his eyes in the hot prairie sunshine. Over at the Cavalry tent the redheaded trooper caught sight of him and waved, and Prawl lifted a hand in answer. Molly edged up and nosed his arm as if asking for her oats. Prawl fondled her ears and rubbed her nose.

"It's northward for us, Molly m'lady," he said softly. "No more Sioux and no more buffaloes and no more bamboo slides. Maybe you and me can get somewhere in this crazy Force yet!"



Mannikin Talk

In the swirling twilight of an Arctic storm, Sergeant Glenmawr and his four-dog team reached the winter camp of the Pikliermiut and halted in the middle of the circle of igloos.

Wary and uneasy, the Mounted sergeant glanced around sharply through the flying spindrift, realizing that the Eskimo band numbered twenty hunters—against his lone self. He saw no one abroad and knew the Pikliermiut were sleeping out the blizzard in the

Eskimo fashion. After getting his rifle from the sled and freeing his holster gun, he called out, "Aksunai, Pikliermiut! I come as friend."

As he waited, he looked around at the snow-block igloos and the big *kozgee* or council house, made of caribou skins and banked high with warm drift. About the whole place there was not one sign of white-man ways. The remote, primitive hunting camp, located on the blizzard-swept beach within easy reach of the seal holes, seemed to him like a page out of man's Stone Age.

Awakened by his shout, the Pikliermiut came pouring out of their snowhouses and surrounded him. The barking of their dogs, the soft "Aah-ee's" of curiosity from the round-faced women, and the guttural grunts of the stocky men made a noisy greeting. Aware that his mission and maybe his very life depended on how they received him, Glenmawr studied the dark, broad faces around his sled, and intuitively he sensed how things stood:

The band knew why he'd come, all right. They knew, and they were on guard against him, down to the smallest *illillegah* and the last husky. They did not seem particularly hostile, at least not yet. From the covert winks and grins of the hunters at one another he saw they were confident that they could stymie him, as they had already stymied Corporal Redfern that first time and the inspector's party that second time.

"I'll be double-dimmied if you do!" Glenmawr thought; and he swore by all the ancient gods of far-off Wales that he was going to nail this Mugwa fellow, by hook or crook, and on top of that he was going to teach

these Pikliermiut a lesson they would not soon forget.

After he had ceremoniously exchanged "*Aksunai*" with every one of the twenty-two men—in the fifty-below-zero storm—they made him welcome, with the friendliness that comes natural to InnuIt peoples. Two of the hunters untoggled the bow lines of his huskies, and others brought frozen tomcod for the team. Willing hands grabbed the sled and whisked it inside the *kozgee*. As for Sergeant Glenmawr himself . . .

A hunter led the Yellow-striped *kabluna* into his igloo and tendered him a heaped-up bowl of seal beef. Then Glenmawr was invited into the next igloo and ate oil-soaked fish. In the third he was given huge slices of the sharp-tasty stomach contents of a caribou that had moss-fed. . . . From snowhouse to snowhouse the *kabluna* progressed, crawling over the dogs that lay in the warm tunnel entrances, and stared at by the bug-eyed little *illillegahs* up on the sleeping platforms, till he had heroically eaten his way around the entire village and was back at the *kozgee* again.

When he went into the council house, he found the Pikliermiut men waiting for him, sitting around the *kozgee* wall, their faces dimly lit by the guttering seal-oil lamps. Glenmawr walked across to his sled and sat down. A hush fell, except for the muffled rip and howl of the storm outside.

"Last year in the Moon-of-the-Blue-Goose-Nesting," he began, speaking the InnuIt tongue without halt, "your small neighbor band, the Oklogmiut, were wiped out by the fever sickness. Only two hunters of the Oklogmiut survived. They came here with their wives and *illillegahs* and asked to live henceforth with the Pik-

liermiut, and you allowed them to stay. They built their igloos by the side of your own; they joined with you in the seal hunting and the caribou spearing-surround. Then in the Moon-of-Flying-Hoarfrost one of your men, this Mugwa, quarreled with a hunter and flung a spear through him, so that the Oklogmiut man died— Is not all this true, O Pikliermiut?”

The men slowly nodded. Sergeant Glenmawr filled his pipe with *stemmo* and went on. “Word of this killing drifted out to the white man’s fort on the River-of-a-Hundred-Mouths. One of the Yellow-striped *kablunas* there traveled over here to find Mugwa and take him to the fort. But Mugwa could not be found. Later came three Yellow-Stripes looking for him, but again Mugwa was not here—neither in the village nor at the seal holes or the caribou yards. Nor would any man of the Pikliermiut tell the Yellow-Stripes where Mugwa had hidden himself.”

The chief hunter gazed at the sergeant steadily and said, “It is not the way of the Pikliermiut, O *Kabluna*, to deliver a blood brother into the hands of strangers. Our quarrels are our quarrels and no concern of the Yellow-striped-horsemen-without-horses.”

Glenmawr stared back at the hunter. “Your words are like the chatter of the foolish *wheeskeejaun* bird. It is our concern that all the tribes of this country live at peace with one another, and that all the men within a tribe keep the peace with one another. When the Goat-Eater Indians tried that time to steal your women at your summertime lodges, while the hunters were gone, we sent men with guns and halted them. If your igloos should become empty in the Moon-of-the-

Lean-Wolves-Wailing, we would send you a sledload of food. Therefore, your troubles are our troubles, and your quarrels are our quarrels. Therefore, when a man among you kills another without reason, it is indeed our concern. This Mugwa, this flinger-of-spears-at-men, must be punished. You must tell me where he is hiding."

The sergeant paused. The sidelong glances of the Pikliermiut hunters at one another told him what he already knew—the killer was hidden somewhere not far from the village, and the whole band was protecting him. With an isolated tribe like these Pikliermiut the blood tie was all-powerful. It overrode their fear of the law, their sense of justice, and even their own secret wish to be rid of a bully like this Mugwa.

Undoubtedly, Glenmawr reflected, the killer was holed up in the hills that lay just inland from the village. Undoubtedly the Pikliermiut were taking him food and seal oil so that he would not have to stir out of his cave when the Mounted parties came.

The chief hunter asked blandly, "And what if we do not choose to tell you, O *Kabluna*, where Mugwa is hiding?"

The sergeant snapped back, "Then I will make magic and find him myself! I will go out into the storm and summon my Familiars, and they will whisper to me of Mugwa's whereabouts."

The chief hunter grinned at him. "Our magic is stronger than your magic, O *Kabluna*." He pointed at the old tribal shaman. "Old Neegeetonga will beat on his *sowyinga* and drive your Familiars away, as he did when the other *kablunas* came."

"Maybel" Glenmawr grunted. "We will see."

Casually he looked around the circle of swarthy faces to locate the man he wanted to talk to—the man whose help he was confident of getting. Katahka, the hunter was called. He was the remaining one of those two Ok-logmiut whose tiny band had been wiped out and who had joined these Pikliermiut. After the killing, Katahka had taken the murdered man's wife and *illilegahs* into his own igloo; but the tribal blood-law had kept him, an outsider, from retaliating at Mugwa for the wanton slaying.

This Katahka, the sergeant had figured, would surely want to see his tribe-brother avenged. If given the slightest chance, the man would tip the Police off to Mugwa's hiding place. "This blood-code business works both ways," Glenmawr had argued with the Officer Commanding, at the fort. "This Katahka won't rest, can't rest, till he puts a spear through Mugwa or sees him dangling from a noose. I'll bet my watch against a gallus button that Katahka will help us out."

It was this conviction that had brought him on the three-hundred-mile trip in the dead of Arctic winter.

Remembering Corporal Redfern's description, he spotted Katahka easily enough—a round-faced hunter of middle age, with several livid weals across his left cheek where a white bear once had clawed him. The man was sitting against the far wall of the *kozgee*, and Glenmawr realized that the Pikliermiut did not trust Katahka and were keeping him away from the white man. He remembered, now, that he had not been taken into Katahka's igloo, or been given any chance to talk to the hunter.

"Darn it all," he thought, and a little of his confidence

drained away, "it's not going to be easy to get in a private word with him, when everybody's watching him and me like hawks. If they catch us talking, they'll slit his throat with a walrus knife."

Taking care not to appear interested, he sized Katakahka up, and the conviction grew on him that the hunter not only wouldn't be given a chance to help him but didn't want to. A round-faced, roundheaded fellow, the man looked too amiable and stolid to harbor any vengeance. In fact, he was paying less attention to the *kabluna* than the other hunters were. He had fashioned himself a *beetinka* plaything, a small, seal-gut mannikin such as the hunters sometimes amused themselves with during their long waits at the seal holes; and with a foolish smile on his face, he was manipulating the toy by its sinew threads. Engrossed in the *beetinka's* antics, he seemed utterly oblivious to the council talk.

Glenmawr swore at him silently. "You dumb slug! Here I foot-slog three hundred miles through an Arctic woolly-whipper, expecting help from you, and you sit there fiddling with that silly doodad."

His hopes for any aid from Katakahka went slumping down to zero. For a little while he smoked in glum silence, cudgeling his brains for a way to locate the elusive Mugwa.

To hunt for the man back in that jumble of frozen hills, cliffs, and willow lakes was as useless as searching for a raindrop that had fallen into the sea. Corporal Redfern had spent a month combing those hills. The corporal had tried also to trail the Pikliermiut men who took food to Mugwa, but they had made the trip only

during blizzards that whipped their tracks shut instantly.

And all the arguments, pleas, and threats that Inspector Greyson and his party could think up had shattered against that code of the blood tie.

The wall of silence all around him angered Glenmawr. As he glared across at Katahka and the seal-gut mannikin, he thought savagely, "I could choke you. What a washout—"

A sudden jolt went through him as he noticed the antics of the grotesquely lifelike *beetinka*. For a second or two he could only stare at the toy and the foolish, smiling Katahka.

"Great Jeerusalem! Look what that fellow's been trying to do. And I didn't catch on. *I'm* the dumb slug—or maybe it was getting stuffed with all that grub."

He made himself look away from Katahka for a minute or two. A chill little fear crept through him lest any of the other men should get suspicious and watch that *beetinka*. If they caught on, they would pin Katahka to the wall with half a dozen spears.

To draw their attention to himself, he swung the talk away from Mugwa and began telling stories about the country of the white man, down in the Lands of the Sun. From years of experience with remote Innuït bands, he knew that the simplest little story about that country was a fairy tale to them; and he started telling them about his last furlough trip—his trip back to old Wales to marry the girl who had waited there for him, and bring her back with him to the Canadian North.

"On this journey of mine," he recounted, "at the igloo place called Edmonton, I got on the great long sled

that runs on tracks of iron instead of ice. And the creature that pulls this sled is bigger than twenty water bears, and eats black rocks, and in one day's time it hauls the huge sled farther than a swift Innuiter hunter can travel in a moon."

The Pikliermiut were leaning forward, their eyes fixed on him; and Glenmawr went on, "And at the igloo place called Winnipeg, I got into a great canoe that has wings and flies through the air; and in the space of a day it carried me across mountains and lakes and tundra and rivers to the Eastern Sea. And there a great *oomiak*, big as an iceberg, carried me across this sea to a huge igloo place called London, where the *kablunas* are like ants for numbers and have tunnels underground like ants, and the igloos are as big as hills . . ."

Without breaking the flow of his story, or letting the eyes of the hunters wander from him, he looked casually again at Katahka and the *beetinka*. Under the Eskimo's deft fingers, the mannikin had been tumbling, dancing, wrestling; it had imitated animals, stalked seals, and pantomimed the age-old legends of the Innuits. But as Katahka caught the sergeant's eye on him, the *beetinka* began telling a little story of a trip . . .

Yawning and stretching, the mannikin got up from sleep and started eastward, shielding its eyes from the morning sun. It came to a river and there turned right, back into the frozen hills. Watching intently, Glenmawr counted three river bends and a fork. There the mannikin turned right again and came to the foot of a high cliff. Then it bent low, like a person creeping through a cave mouth, stopped, and lay down to sleep.

The sergeant went on smoothly with his own story—

of old Wales, and Gwenda and their honeymoon trip back to Canada; but his blood was pounding. "The river fork, the cliff, the first cave—I couldn't miss. Not bad, Katahka, and your doodad—right under the noses of twenty-two men!"

It was late the next afternoon, in the taut, still cold of sixty below zero, when Glenmawr once again halted his dogs in the center of the igloo circle. He was weary and hungry, and he ached to think of the long white leagues back to the fort and to Gwenda. But he would be going back triumphant. He had a prisoner trussed up in the sleeping bag on his sled, and the prisoner was the sullen-eyed Mugwa.

He had brought his prisoner back there deliberately, to show the Pikliermiut that one Yellow-Stripe was unafraid of a whole village; that he walked with the power and might of an unseen host. And he had been worrying about Katahka and wanted to forestall any danger to him. If the Pikliermiut should ever get suspicious of Katahka, the amiable roundhead would get speared and stuck down through a seal hole.

In an awed silence, the Pikliermiut, standing close around the sled, looked at the scowling Mugwa and then at the rock-faced sergeant. Ruefully the chief hunter observed, "Your magic is in truth greater than our magic, O *Kabluna*. Since you left us yesterday, old Neegeetonga has not ceased beating his *sowyunga*. But it was useless."

"You have learned wisdom," the sergeant remarked. "It is always useless to stand against the Yellow-Stripes.

I can understand that Mugwa was of your blood, but nevertheless you must never again shield a killer—”

He caught sight of Katahka, back at the edge of the crowd. The hunter was still carrying the *beetinka*, and seemed completely indifferent toward the prisoner on the sled; but Glenmawr noticed that his eyes were going uneasily from face to face around him.

The sergeant called out at him accusingly, “But you, Katahka, who would not help the other Yellow-Stripes or help me—you I cannot understand. You are of the murdered man’s own blood; you have his woman and *illillegahs* in your very igloo, and yet you would not tell me one word or lift one finger to avenge your blood brother! You are a worm, O Katahka! A worm, a rabbit, a thing of the mud! Get out of my sight! Go and fiddle with your silly doodad!”

Under the lash of the white man’s tongue, Katahka meekly bowed his head. But as he turned away, he caught the sergeant’s eye and made a slight gesture toward the *beetinka* in his hand. Sergeant Glenmawr looked, looked twice, and had to swipe a mitten across his mouth to hide his laugh.

The mannikin in Katahka’s hand was dangling prophetically in the air, with one of the sinew threads noosed around its neck.



A Relic of the Vikings

In the lashing fury of the Arctic storm, Sergeant Imley and his young Eskimo guide were cutting snow blocks and building a small igloo—pitching their camp, in the fashion of wise hunters, on the spot where they had made their game kill.

Just a few minutes ago the young Ogohko, breaking trail, had shot point-blank at a dim wraith in the storm and brought down a white yearling caribou.

All day the Mounted sergeant and Ogohko, in the

teeth of the polar blizzard, had pushed north across the icy sierras of Fox Land, so near the top of the world that from longitude to longitude was only a fair day's travel. Though the woolly-whipper was so blinding that they could not see twenty paces into the queer half-light, the stalwart young guide had followed unerringly the age-old *komatik* trail that wound northward through the frozen coastal hills.

It was good to be out exploring again, Sergeant Imley mused, catching the snow blocks that Ogohko cut and tossed at him. And good to be a hundred long miles from the tiny Mounted post where he and Constable Stuart had been stationed for two endless years, apparently forgotten by the Force and by all the rest of humanity down in the Lands of the Sun. To keep themselves from "shaking hands with the willows," he had encouraged Stuart to prospect for placer gold in the moraine gravels of the mountains, while he himself began exploring into a mystery that was a thousand years old and as baffling as it was ancient.

He was hunting for proof that the Iclander Vikings of ten centuries ago had discovered Fox Land during their far sea-wanderings, as the Sagas stated. Under the boldest of the Viking captains, they had planted a colony on the Arctic island and built their stone summer huts there, and had fought with the native Innuits—so the Sagas ran.

But in two years of hunting, the sergeant had not found one stone of those ancient *hellu-hutta*, nor one faintest evidence that the tall Sea Warriors had ever set foot on that remote polar shore.

He capped the little beehive igloo with a block of snow and then crawled in at the tunnel entrance, with his tump pack and eider sleeping poke. Above the savage fury of the blizzard outside, he could hear big Ogohko singing lustily while flensing the caribou. After a long succession of stolid and silent guides, the buoyant Ogohko seemed to him a rare find as a trail companion. A member of the Iglulermiut band, which dwelt near the Mounted post, the high-spirited young InnuIt had been keen for the month-long trip, even though he was only recently married to the sunny, round-faced creature called Aikalwa. On the trail he was always singing, laughing—at the slightest pretext for merriment, he would throw back his head and roar softly.

More important still in Sergeant Imley's eyes, Ogohko was a treasure trove of Eskimo legend and superstition. He seemed to know more tales of the snowlands than the oldest shamans, and he told them with huge gusto, although he himself believed not one word of them. A born iconoclast, he was derisive toward the shaman magic and folklore of his people. He would finish a story with a great flourish and then demand, "Now, isn't that a whopper?" and he would toss his head and roar till the fox tail on his parka danced and jiggered.

Presently Ogohko came crawling in. The sergeant cooked thick caribou collops on the primus plate and made scones, and they ate. After they had put out the primus and lighted the sea-oil lamp, they leaned back on their pokes.

"This stretch of shore," the sergeant said, in the InnuIt tongue, "is the last I have left to hunt, Ogohko.

The storm has swept the beach bare of snow. Bare enough that the old stone huts will show, if there be any along this coast."

"Stone by stone," Ogohko remarked, "I will eat whatever old stone huts you will find, O *Kabluna*." And he tossed his head and laughed.

In the dim yellow light Sergeant Imley studied the big youngster. Somehow Ogohko seemed different from his fellow-Iglulermiut; different indeed from all the Innuits of the great Arctic island. He tried to pin this strangeness down and word it, but he could not, and he told himself it was only his imagination. He knew that under the flash and play of the Borealis, in the long winter dark, a man's eyes sometimes played odd tricks on him. In the queer gloom he had shot at an Arctic lemming on a windrow ten feet away, in the belief that it was a polar bear loping along a ridge-line; and he had seen hunters drop their spears and flee in terror from a snowshoe rabbit. So Ogohko's strangeness, he thought, was likely a mere fancy.

"Now that we have made a meat kill, Ogohko," he said, "we can camp here for seven sleeps and hunt this coast."

"In seven-and-seventy sleeps you will find no stone huts, *Kabluna*."

"But your own people have legends about the Sea Men, Ogohko."

"The stories are old wives' tales!"

"Maybe," Imley twitted him, "you are trying to dishearten me so that you can get back the sooner to Aikalwa. She is very pretty, your girl-wife. I do not blame you, Ogohko, for wishing to go home. But we came

here to hunt for the *hellu-hutta*. Soon enough you will be with Aikalwa again."

Ogohko tossed his head and laughed softly. "I will hunt with you till your legs wear off, O Yellow-striped-horseman-without-a-horse. We will comb the sea edge and the beaches and the hills till your tongue drags on the snow. I will be your guide to Nudujen Inlet, to Tunniren, Tudjan, and even to Akpansoak. But we will find no stone houses."

The sergeant jerked a little with surprise. Ogohko had named the exact path of that long-ago Viking band in its legendary wandering! The exact path that the Sagas had set down. How under heaven had he known? Or was it merely coincidence?

"Do you not, Ogohko," he prompted, "believe one word of those legends about the Sea Warriors?"

"Not one breath!" Ogohko said stoutly. "And more, *Kabluna*—even if they were true, you would find no stone houses. True or false, no houses."

"You must have some story to explain that," Imley said. He handed over his tin of *stemmo* for Ogohko's pipe. "What is it?"

"It is a story," Ogohko replied, helping himself generously, "that was told to me by old Natagliak, who bleeds at the mouth when he talks; to him it was told by Eumenek, his father; to him by Tojak; to him by Kriliak; to him by—"

"Stop!" Imley interposed. "My ears buzz with names of the long-dead. How many have been the generations?"

Ogohko held up a hand. "Four times that. And the first teller in that long ago was Knuluk, chief hunter of

the Iglulermiut, who could take two bears by the scruff of their necks and bang their heads together."

"That," Imley remarked, "Really is a whopper. But what has that to do with the legend of the Sea Warriors?"

"Nothing, O Yellow-striped-horseman-without-a-horse—except that both lies came from the same mouth!" The young giant roared softly and tossed his head at having scored so decisively.

After a moment, Imley said, "Tell me about this Knuluk of twenty generations ago, who played so roughly with polar bears."

Ogohko stuffed his pipe with still more of the sergeant's precious, dwindling *stemmo*, and finally began recounting.

It was very, very long ago, O *Kabluna*. As many generations ago as I have fingers and toes—plus one to make up for the toe that is frozen off. In that long ago the Iglulermiut were the strongest of the Island tribes, numbering five times as many igloos as now.

One day in the Moon-of-Birds-Flying-Southward, a hunter from a tribe far up the coast came stumbling into the village of the Iglulermiut. He was bleeding from a dozen great wounds, and one arm was cloven off at the shoulder; but before he dropped dead he told of what had happened to him and to his tribe, the Yakakapmiut.

He told of how a strange great *oomiak* had been storm-driven ashore and wrecked, along the coast to the north. Of how sixty giant strangers, who were fair of face and sang as they marched, had come

ashore with their wives and *illillegahs*. The men wore shirts of iron, he said, and headpieces of iron, and they swung axes of iron behind round shields of oxhide.

All the hunters of the Yakakapmiut went out to meet them. The strangers asked for peace, but the Yakakapmiut gave them a shower of arrows and harpoons instead, and the battle was begun.

It was long and bloody, O *Kabluna*, there on the ice plain by Tudjan. The Yakakapmiut slew many of the strangers, but every giant that fell was ringed around with the bodies of hunters who would hunt no more. And at last the singing Sea Men stood alone on the battle ice, cleansing their weapons and looking around at the Yakakapmiut dead. Only the hunter whose arm was cloven from his shoulder by the stroke of an ax escaped the slaughter and fled to warn the Iglulermiut.

On hearing the news, Knuluk gathered his men and gave orders. The women and *illillegahs* were taken on komatiks to a place of safety in a hidden ice gorge. Harpoons were piled handily, spearheads were removed, and knives were whetted against green walrus ivory. Hunters and weapons were all in readiness when the fair-faced giants, singing and stroking iron on iron, appeared in the valley and came down to meet the Iglulermiut.

At their singing the hunters trembled, but they were brave men and they moved forward with Knuluk to confront the enemy.

After the great fight with the Yakakapmiut there were but thirty of the giants, and many of them bore wounds of arrow or harpoon. But they came on, neither faster

nor slower, and approached the Iglulermiut; and at their head strode a giant, taller than any of them, tossing his ax in the air and catching it.

When they were still two long harpoon-flings away, this leader of the singing strangers grasped an iron-shod spear, drew back his arm, and hurled the weapon as never before had an Eskimo seen a spear hurled. It sailed over Knuluk's head and over all his band of men and shattered upon the ice beyond. Whereupon the leader raised his hand and the singing and stroking of iron on iron stopped.

"*Aksunai!*" he shouted, so that the hills around flung back his voice. "*Aksunai*, Eskimos, we come peacefully. Be wise and let us pass."

The Iglulermiut laughed in scorn, and Knuluk called back, "Peacefully, O White Skins? Your wounds are still green from the slaughter of the Yakakapmiut."

"It is no fault of ours if our trail be red with blood," answered the leader. "We sought no battle; it was forced upon us. We want only to pass your village peacefully and avoid bloodshed. Our sea canoe was storm-cast upon these shores, and we are jetsam. We would get back to our people, and our trail is long and weary. If we are to meet those of our own blood again, we must travel south a hundred sleeps to Helluland, of the Flat Stones. Perhaps we must travel south even two hundred sleeps, to the shores called Vinland, where Leif the Lucky and Njal the One-Eye visit in summer. Therefore bid your skraelings move aside and let us pass."

Knuluk, being wise, would have agreed to the request. But the Iglulermiut began crying out, "They

slaughtered our kinsmen, the Yakakapmiut! Even so will they deal with us."

A knot of young hunters ran forward and flung their weapons. The tall leader caught a spear in mid-air and tossed it through an Eskimo. The fair-haired women of the giants fell back; the singing and stroking of iron on iron began afresh; the Iglulermiut surged forward, and the battle with the Sea Men was on.

Their shields of oxhide made a solid wall, *Kabluna*, against which the Eskimo harpoons and spears rattled harmlessly. A shower of iron-tipped arrows cut down half a score of the Iglulermiut, for they knew nothing of fighting in a body. Hence, when the shield-wall of the tall warriors struck them, they could not hold ground, though they were as five to one. With their iron axes and with never an abatement in their singing, the strangers cut a broad path through the huddled Eskimos.

Knuluk and a dozen picked men flung themselves forward to break the shield-wall, but they were tossed back like spindrift from a cliff. The numbers that were slain were five of the wounded strangers and thirty of the Iglulermiut.

A knot of ten Eskimos ran up the hillslope and tossed harpoons into the midst of the enemy. Five of the fair-faces marched up the hill and slew the ten hunters. Before they could return through the deep snow, they were hemmed in by Knuluk's men. Still singing, as they plied spear and battle-ax, they fell forward on their faces, one by one. The numbers of the slain were twelve of the giants and fifty of the hunters.

Knuluk then sent men to make a show of attacking the fair-faced women, but these fought like fierce she-bears and drew bow with deadly aim. When the warriors saw their women attacked, they fell back in an orderly way, still singing and stroking iron on iron, to form a wall about their wives and *illillegahs*, as the bulls of the musk oxen do against wolf packs.

Craftily Knuluk drew his men off. They were sick of the senseless slaughter, but the peace they had refused could no more be brought back than the slain could rise and walk. It was battle to the death now.

"See, we have killed many of them," Knuluk encouraged his fighters. "Those that remain have no more of the iron-tipped spears. They are flinging back at us only the weapons that we throw at them. Let us fight from a little distance, so that they will have to use their bows. When they have no more arrows, then we will close with them and avenge our brethren speedily."

But the strangers were quick to see through this stratagem, and they ceased shooting. Their bows, *Kabluna*, were as tall as they, and so strong that not an Eskimo could draw an arrow to the head. The strings were of the flaxen hair of the fair-faced women; and when a bowstring broke, a woman sprang up ready with a new string braided from her own hair. Ah, they were fighting fiends, *Kabluna*. Their very singing, which rose and fell with the tide of battle, chilled the hearts of the Iglulermiut.

When Knuluk saw that they had guessed his cunning, he bade part of his men hurry to the igloos and fetch all the hides of caribou and walrus they could find. Then he ordered big shields fashioned of the hides;

big enough that behind each a dozen men could hide in safety. The fair-faced warriors loosed a shower of arrows while the shields were in the making, but Knuluk merely drew his men back out of range. Four of the great shields were made and placed properly on the four sides of the enemy. Then Knuluk gave a shout, and the ramparts moved forward.

Still the giants sang and stroked iron on iron, even those who knelt bleeding in the snow, while the tall leader tossed his ax in the air and caught it.

Behind their shelters of hides the Iglulermiut moved steadily forward, certain that now they could break the shield-wall and come at the warriors body to body. The fair-faces arched arrows high into the air and wounded several Eskimos, but so many of the hunters had died that those who lived had grown dull toward death and had little fear of it.

The arrows ceased. No spears were tossed from either side. Even the singing quavered as the great shields moved forward foot by foot and met the circle of warriors. Massed behind their shelters, the Iglulermiut struck irresistibly. The circle was broken, and the hunters leaped into their midst.

It was battle-ax against spear; one warrior against four hunters. In that fierce *mêlée* the Eskimos fought silently with their long knives; the fair-faces slashed and hewed with short, heavy swords. They could cleave a man's brainpan at one stroke, and they fought like bull bears at the spearing-surround.

But they had been flung apart; they no longer stood leg to leg and shield to shield. Moreover the Iglulermiut had learned to strike them where the iron shirt

met the iron headdress—where the neck could be pierced. The tall warriors were battling fiends, sinking to a knee under a thrust but rising to cleave an Eskimo's head from his shoulders even while they struggled in the death throe. But as wolves can bring down the male of the caribou, so the remnant of Iglulermiut, fighting silently, brought down the warriors one by one, till only the tall leader was still on his feet, battling.

Knuluk and five others were thrusting at him, and his iron shirt ran red with his own blood. He swung his heavy ax in a circle by the chain which held it to his wrist, and brained two hunters who had flung themselves at him. While he swung his ax, he drew his hand across his eyes to wipe away the blood so that he might see clearly. Even Knuluk trembled at the ferocity of his face.

In the breathing space that they gave him, he turned and saw that all his warriors were lying on the snow. With a great voice he called an order to the fair-haired women, who thereupon began to seize weapons and turn them against themselves. But at a word from Knuluk, the Iglulermiut ran in and tore the weapons from the women's hands.

The tall leader did not see this. Bearing the song of the warriors by himself, he sprang at the knot of hunters around Knuluk. A spear thrust broke the fastening of his iron headdress, and he fought uncovered. He dashed his ax against the face of an Eskimo, and with a backstroke he clove through the shoulder of Knuluk, so that the great hunter thereafter was helpless as a babe.

But then a spear from the hand of Knuluk's son

hurtled through the air, and it struck the tall leader in the throat. He sank to a knee, sank to the snow— His song, and the slaughter, and the trek of the wandering, fair-faced giants were ended.

By the order of Knuluk, the flaxen-haired women were spared. "They are of the blood of the great warriors," he said. "We will take them to wife among us, and thereafter the blood of the fighting Sea Men will run in the veins of the Iglulermiut."

Sergeant Imley sat silent, still hearing the din and echoes of that ancient, greathearted battle. As he stared into the guttering seal-oil flame, he felt that the story he had just heard was as wild and stark as any told by the Sagas themselves. As wild and fierce as the epics of Leif and Eric and the Njal who was burned under the oxhide.

Presently a chuckle from Ogohko brought him back to the present. The young Eskimo was looking at him and laughing.

"Now, wasn't that old story a whopper?" he demanded, with a toss of his parka fox tail. "Ho! Singing giants dressed in iron. And women braiding bowstrings of their flaxen hair! And later bearing children to the hunters of my people, the Iglulermiut! The tale of Knuluk cracking bear heads together is as nothing, *Kabluna*, to that whopper."

As the sergeant looked at Ogohko, in the yellow light glow, he gasped in astonishment. As by a lightning flash he suddenly realized what was strange about the stalwart young Inuit. The blue-gray eyes, the old-Norse face, the hair with a touch of flaxen— Heaven and Val-

halla, there was Viking blood in the veins of this strapping young Eskimo guide! The blood of those old Seafarers, ten centuries dead!

"Is it not a most silly story, O *Kabluna*?" Ogohko insisted, laughing softly.

Imley got hold of himself. "Quite silly," he agreed, meeting those gray-blue eyes. "Laugh a big laugh at it, Ogohko—it is truly one whopper of a story."



St. Gabriel Zsbyski

The roaring Saskatchewan blizzard slammed open the door of the Mounted barracks and blew in six feet of sandy-whiskered, ice-sheathed corporal. While he fumbled to find the doorknob, he drew a hand from his bearskin glove and clawed at the sleet in his eyelashes.

"Shut the doo-or, Zyl!" Constable Coffey yelled, from his perch on top a double-decker bunk. It was considerably warmer up there.

"—the do-oo-or, Zy!" chorused three other constables and Sergeant Pedneault, who were playing euchre behind the red-hot stove.

The six men, along with Inspector Nuttall, were the entire detachment at the Police post in western Saskatchewan. The Klondike rush, then in its full swing, had drawn heavily on the whole Northwest Mounted. The little gang of hard-bitten veterans under Nuttall had to police a prairie-park region as big as a state; had to take care of the immigrants trekking across from Winnipeg, and send monthly patrols north and east to keep check on the Strong-Woods Crees; and they carried on an endless battle with the Border rings of smugglers and branding-iron artists that kept springing up like toadstools.

In a voice that resembled a buffalo cough, Corporal Zsbyski rapped, "How in the devil did you expect me to get in—down the chimley, like Santy Claus? Or did you expect me to stay out in the stable?"

His jacket crackled as he pulled it off. For a minute it stood grotesquely stiff in front of the stove; then it slowly began to wilt.

"You should've come in off patrol when this woolly-whipper first struck, Zy," Sergeant Pedneault remarked. "The rest of us all got back in by ten o'clock this morning. What I mean, this blizzard is dangerous. Nuttall says nobody sticks his nose outside till it stops. When the weather holds off till near Christmas, the first woolly-whipper is always a honeypeloozer, they say. Even so, this beats any blizzard I ever saw. It's so cold you can spit icicles, except it's so cold you can't spit."

"Yeah, our nice weather sure ended abrupt," Con-

stable Hightower put in. "Last night I slept in one blanket on the open prairie, and it was still balmy at eight this morning. Then a little rain, a little sleet, and then—stop kicking me, Breden, I know what to lead—then bang! she came whooping over the hills and dropped the tempee-chur ten feet below freezo before I could aim my hoss for the post and git going."

"Zy's stiff coat there 'minds me," Breden commented, "that my jacket got wet this morning in that sleety rain, so I took it off and carried it on the saddle. The first howl struck so quick that the coat froze bone-hard before I could get it on."

"It handled me rougher than anybody," said Constable Morrow, the sergeant's partner, "because I was ankling across Muskeg Bottom, where she got a clean swat at me. She'd hit me one way and knock me over, then hit me the other and knock me back. I'd be leaning ag'inst her, and she'd stop so sudden I'd fall down. Finally I got a smart idee; I stretched my coattails out wide for a sail—and I only touched ground three times between the Bottom and here!"

"I believe that," Coffey remarked, "in spite of your telling it, Morrow. But where I was, this blizzard hit the quickest and hardest of anywhere. The inspector sent me over to Beaver Lake this morning on one of these thank-you jobs for Indian Agent Duncan. The whitefish were cutting didos something fierce; you know how they jump up out of the water during rain or sleet, to see what's coming next. Well, one big boy—he must've weighed twenty pounds—flipped out and turned a somersault and started under again. But just then that first blast came roaring across the water, and

it laid down skating ice. That big white fish didn't quite make it back under the water. If you don't believe me, you can mosey over there and see his tail and hindquarters sticking out of the ice yet!"

"What a congeration of liars I got to live with," Corporal Zsbyski growled, pulling off his boots and heavy clothing in anticipation of "bunk patrol" that afternoon. "But I admit that this is a dangerous blow to be out in. If she's all this cold with a gale howling, what'll she be when the wind lays and the still cold comes on? Does anybody know what happened with that bunch of spirit-wrestlers that was a-wandering around our district looking for the Promised Land?"

"Lay off the sarcastics, Zsbyski," Coffey objected, with some heat. "You've got no call to scoff at them Doukhobors. Their belief may be a mite queer, but they're dead earnest about it."

"Well, then," Zsbyski came back, "God pity the poor sailors on the sea tonight. D'you object to that, Coffey?"

"I swear, Zy," Sergeant Pedneault said, "you take the cake for blasphemy. When Gabriel blows his horn, you'll throw your bootjack at him for waking you up. Looky, if you don't mend your wicked ways, Agent Duncan is going to give it to you in the neck. He's complained about you to Division headquarters already."

Zsbyski flushed red. "D'you know my opinion about that mealmouthed hypocrite?"

"I do, Zy," said Pedneault. "And I'll double anything you say about him, so long as it's uncomplimentary. But that don't alter the fact that he's riding you and he's going to put you on the greased skids, unless you watch your step. But let's forget old Sour-Face. Din-

ner's all over, but we kept some hay and oats warm for you. Better hurry and tie into it. Soon as Morrow and me finish skinning this pair of cheaters, you and me have got to get in some practice with the boxing mitts. Nuttall says that if one of us don't win that boxing belt, he'll bust us both to buck cops."

In the boarded-off mess corner of the quarters Zsbyski swallowed several sweet potatoes candied with maple syrup, a hunk of moose jerky, bread with blueberry jam, and a mug of coffee. As he cocked his chair back and drank a second mug, he was thinking angrily about Mr. George M. Duncan, the Indian Agent at Lac Outarde Settlement. Duncan's predecessor, Forrest Ewing, had broken down under his severe labors a year before and had been replaced, but Duncan was in no danger of breaking down from overwork. He wore out no horses in the summer or dogteams in winter visiting his extensive parish. He was supposed to visit the different Indian bands and half-breed settlements, and counsel them about crops, gardens, and livestock. But instead, he lived at Lac Outarde in his big, comfortable house and let the Cree bands get along as best they could. A thin-haired, dyspeptic man of forty, the Agent was called Sour-Face by the Indians and a variety of things by the other people of that frontier country.

His hostility toward Corporal Zsbyski had started the previous spring when the corporal, in his blunt way, had told the Agent that instead of sending out those bales of pious handbills to the Cree bands, he ought to be going around showing them how to grow gardens and milk a cow. The corporal's remarks had kindled

Duncan's wrath, and ever since then the Agent had been out to get him kicked off the Force, on charges of profanity, irreligion, and pernicious example to the Indians.

Even Zsbyski's best friends had to admit that the charges had some appearance of being true. A rough-speaking, scoffing sinner, Zsbyski had spent his thirty-three years knocking around at a dozen different raw occupations. Born on an immigrant ship coming from the North Baltic, he spoke three European tongues, besides English and French; and this fluency in five languages naturally lent color and punch to his speech. His several seasons in the Quebec sugarbush, his lobster-fishing trips on the Blue-Nose coast, his turns on a Newfoundland sealer, his mule-logging on the upper Saguenay, and his two years as a Cavalry trooper in Montana—all this had gone into his rough, hard-hitting make-up.

Sucking a quill toothpick, Zsbyski strode out to the stove again and stood watching the euchre game. It was a neck-and-neck finish. In that last round Breden attempted to get Hightower's attention and pass him the right bower under the table. Pretending to scratch his shin, Sergeant Pedneault intercepted the pass and got the card himself. Breden half-choked as the sergeant solemnly plumped down the bower on the board, captured the crucial trick, and won the game!

Constable Coffey had already cleared a space in the middle of the barracks and chalked a ring on the floor. Pedneault brought out the boxing gloves and tossed a pair to Zsbyski.

For three seasons straight Sergeant Pedneault had

been boxing champion of the Western Division; and at Regina last year he had won top honors in the whole Mounted. His most serious opposition was right at home, in the hefty person of Gabriel Zsbyski. In a bare-knuckle fight Zsbyski's equals were few and far between, but in boxing something was wrong with him. Pedneault regularly outstepped, outboxed, and outhit him, and yet the sergeant had a hunch that Zsbyski was a little the better man.

Amiable and easy-go-lucky, Pedneault was willing that Zsbyski should go down to Regina in his stead if the corporal stood the better chance at the belt. He and Zsbyski had gone through the "Awkward Squad" together, come west together, and had been together for years. They had traded wallops in barracks practice, singed their whiskers fighting the same prairie fires, and had stood leg to leg in knock-down fights with the turbulent *métis* when the latter got out of hand.

The practice that afternoon was the same story—Pedneault punched Zsbyski all over the ring. As Breden called time for the fourth round to start, the sergeant came out slowly, scratching his beard with his gloved thumb.

"I think I've puzzled out what's wrong with you, Zy. You're the kind of a boxer who's got to be either as cool as a cucumber or else mad as a grizzly on the prod. When you're cool, you can box, and when you're mad, you can hit like a mule kick. But you somehow keep just betwixt—"

They were interrupted. The door slammed open and Inspector Nuttall came in.

"I'm glad to see you're back, Zsbyski," the O.C. said,

plainly relieved. "When you didn't show up this morning with the other men, I began to worry about you."

"I was delayed over at Loon Waddle Portage, sir," Zsbyski explained simply. "I had to straighten things up at Johnny Bad-Man's place."

The corporal did not give the details of straightening up the half-breed household, which were: thrashing Johnny Bad-Man sober, helping his wife put up a tin heating stove, running the cow, horse, and goat into the wolf pen, and making a jump-rabbit toy for the little Indian boy.

Nuttall looked thoughtfully at the chalked boxing ring and then at the cards scattered on the table. He motioned to his two noncoms and they followed him aside.

"It's no affair of mine," he told them, "how you men spend your off-duty time; you've little enough of it, goodness knows. I'm not objecting personally to your boxing in barracks, or having a sociable game of cards, but it sounds deuced bad in a complaint. Especially against you, Zsbyski. I just received a sharp query about you from headquarters, and I don't quite know what to reply, because—well, some of Duncan's charges have some show of truth to them."

For the third time the door slammed open, and in came a middle-aged Cree who was doing thirty days about the post for setting out a prairie fire to drive game.

"Devil box jingle-jingle," he informed Nuttall.

The inspector turned up his coat collar and hurried off to his cabin. When he came back, his six men were

sitting about the stove, thumbs in vest-holes, grumbling. The O.C.'s face was long, and a worried look stood in his eyes. The men straightened up on their chairs, knowing that something had gone badly wrong.

"The Hudson Bay man at Lac Outarde Settlement," Nuttall said tersely, "just called me over the Police line. He reports that those two hundred Doukhobors are caught in this blizzard seven miles north of the settlement and eleven miles northeast of here. They're at the wagon ford on Rivière San Sautes. They've got no tents, no winter clothes, and no gumption about weather like this."

"Great blue blazes!" Zsbyski spluttered. The other men were silent, in the silence of consternation.

Nuttall went on, "Those people can't last many hours in this blizzard—particularly the women and children. About the only hope is to get them back to shelter at Lac Outarde. I don't know if it's humanly possible to get through to them. Frankly, the chances are slim. I can't *order* any man of you to try it; the risk of getting lost and freezing to death is too heavy. But . . ."

It was a call for a volunteer, and all six men knew it.

Silence gripped the barracks, save for the blizzard roaring down from the Arctic Barrens and screaming over the Mounted quadrangle. Breathing a little heavily, the men glanced at one another, shuffled their feet awkwardly—and said nothing. The ominous howling outside was a warning.

It was Corporal Zsbyski who broke the taut silence. His tilted chair came down with a thump.

"Hang it, I'll go! I just cain't let them poor souls freeze

to death while I hug a stove or snooze around in my bunk. Besides, I'm the only one here can talk their lingo."

Sergeant Pedneault spoke up. "I'll go with you, Zy."

Zsbyski scowled and kicked a chair. "You stay right here, Ped. In a storm like this'n we'd be hunting each other half the time. It's better for one man to have his own head and bust through. I'm the man to go, and I'm going alone."

The constables began to breathe easier. The O.C. looked at Pedneault. "Zsbyski is right, Sergeant. Besides, you'll be needed here at the post. Corporal, get yourself ready and come over to my cabin. Immediately. We've got only a few hours of light at the most."

Zsbyski dressed quickly in clothes that were warm but not bundlesome. Carrying a pair of bear-paw racquets for the new snow, he left the barracks and crossed the quadrangle to Nuttall's cabin.

The inspector, fully dressed, was examining his racquet strings as Zsbyski came in. The corporal stared at him and blurted out, "Them fur duds you've got on, sir—what in consternation are they for?"

"I'm going along with you on this patrol," Nuttall said quietly. "I don't ask for volunteers on any patrol that I myself won't face."

Corporal Zsbyski balked. He knew that one man stood as good a chance of getting through as two men. If he couldn't get through, his O.C. certainly couldn't either. Whatever happened, he would not need the inspector's help.

"You're not going—blast me you're not!" he snorted,

balking flat-footed. "You're staying here and running the post."

"Since when," Nuttall demanded, "have you been the Officer Commanding around here?"

"It's not that I'm giving you any orders, sir. It's just that you're not going along. Horse sense is horse sense."

Inspector Nuttall slowly put down his racquets. He knew that when Corporal Gabriel Zsbyski balked, nothing short of an avalanche could budge the man.

"Well," he said, "if you simply won't have it my way—"

"Not with butter and jam on!" Zsbyski grunted.

Nuttall took out his belt-gun, carefully wiped off the oil, and handed the weapon to the corporal. "Better take this, along with yours. Also, my gelding is already saddled up in the stable.

"Now, look. If you do get through to the Doukhobors, I suggest that you lead them down the San Sautes Valley to the settlement. The deep valley will be a windbreak, and the frozen stream will make good, level going. Now, a word about these Doukhobors. They're under the leadership of a big fellow who calls himself St. John the Apostle. He's led them into all sorts of misery by wandering about looking for he doesn't know what. They obey him implicitly. He's a fanatic and may cause you trouble if you don't handle him easy."

"I'll handle him," Zsbyski promised. "But I've got to be starting."

Nuttall laid a hand on the doorknob. His strait-laced manner dropped from him; he swallowed hard and held out his hand. "Corporal, I hope to heaven that—that you—"

"I'll get through, don't worry," Zsbyski reassured him, and flung out into the storm.

2

As he fought his way across the open quadrangle to the stable, Zsbyski was appalled at the fury of the blizzard. He had known what he was bargaining for, but still he was daunted. The savage coldness of the gale clutched at his breath and beat at him with its wings, like a living thing. It screamed at him, volleyed shot-hard pellets into his face, and lapped him in a blinding swirl of spume.

"She's *hiyu* wicked, all right!" he gasped, dodging into the stable. "But I've seen wickeder—blast me, I have!"

This was a lie to keep up his nerve, and he knew it. He had never seen a worse blizzard; he had never seen its equal.

The Cree waiting inside was stoically rubbing snow on an ear which had been frosted when he came across from the cabin, thirty yards away. He helped Zsbyski with the gelding, and it was a job to get the horse out of the barn. The animal's instinct seemed to warn it against leaving the building. When the side door was opened, the horse snorted, jerked loose, and plunged back into its stall. But finally Zsbyski and the Cree coaxed and pulled it outside.

Zsbyski climbed into the saddle, headed the gelding into the blizzard, and spurred it forward.

The route from the Mounted post to Rivière Sans Sautes led across eleven miles of high, exposed prairie cut by four timbered valleys. The upland was buried

under two feet of powder-fine snow and swept by changing, swirling windrows of drift. The deep valleys would give a little respite from the gale, but to a horse they were almost impassable. Floundering snowbanks filled them to the level of the lower limbs of the white-woods; and their wind-swept eastern slopes were sheeted with ice from the rain just before the storm.

Coaxed and urged by Zsbyski, the gelding traversed a mile and a half in hopeful time, and they reached the first valley. But at the top of the icy slope the horse stopped short. Coaxing and spurring availed nothing. The animal pranced this way and that, smelling, snorting, and backing up from the icy edge.

Giving it a free rein because there was nothing else to do, Zsbyski began to suspect that the animal was figuring out some way of its own to get down the slope. He was right. When it had thoroughly inspected the slope, it gingerly approached a slick place, planted its forefeet on the ice, drew up its hind feet carefully, braced all four legs, and started sliding. Horse and rider brought up in more or less orderly fashion in a snowbank down in the little valley.

The corporal knocked a path through the drifted bottom and led the horse across to the opposite slope. Sheltered from the wind, it was snow-covered but not drifted, and they got up it without great trouble.

Across the two miles to the next timber belt, the gelding managed to butt its way through the gale. But the storm was breaking its nerve, and the ceaseless lash of the Arctic cold was driving it panicky. The horse was new to the West, and Zsbyski could understand the dumb, quivering terror that the storm aroused in it.

At the next ice-sheeted slope the gelding pranced this way and that along the edge, refusing to try getting down the glass-smooth hill. Zsbyski dismounted and attempted to lead the animal down. A sudden plunge of the horse tore the reins out of his hand; he slipped, lost his footing, and went careening down the slope till he fetched up in a jumble of half-buried boulders.

He got up, shook himself, and glanced up at the top, but the gelding was nowhere to be seen. "No use scrambling back up there and looking," he muttered. "That poor critter is high-tailing it back to the post—and blast me if I blame him."

When he groped around and found his racquets, he was staggered to see that the beam of one of them was broken. A broken racquet in this savage blizzard, with miles yet to go to Rivière Sans Sautes . . .

He drew off his mittens and gloves to mend the racquet, but before he could cut a leather strip from his boot tops, his fingers were as numb and stiff as wooden pegs. Cursing his luck, he toed into the racquets, swung on down to the valley bottom and up the west slope—and ran into the teeth of the blizzard howling over the highland.

The rocky, saw-tooth hill range north of the post was like an instrument in the hands of the storm. Passes and high cliffs were stops and keys. From a low roaring to a shrill howl the blizzard blew through them in a dozen different storm-notes. It would lull for a moment, and the spume would lay; then it would strike a clublike blow, sometimes so sharp and hard that Zsbyski dropped on hands and knees till it kicked over.

Forty-seven degrees below zero, with winds that rose to sixty miles an hour—it seemed to Zsbyski that the country had been changed into an inferno, where all light and warmth and life had vanished. He had to breathe through the fur of his mittens, and even so, his lungs burned. He fought ahead cautiously, knowing that any struggle or exertion meant deep breathing, and this would bring the danger of frozen lungs. Unable to see any landmarks in the blanketing spume, he plowed along with eyes half-closed, trusting to his instinct for guidance.

In the third timbered valley he stopped to rest. After lopping off an armful of spruce boughs, he scooped out a hole with his racquet, and threw the boughs in to sit on. In a general way he knew where he was, but before going on he chopped into several birches to make sure that his north and south were still straight, for he realized that any wasted steps might be fatal. Four miles still lay ahead of him, the snow was piling deeper, his left racquet had become a sorry excuse, and he would have the blizzard full in his teeth over those four endless miles.

It took an hour and a half to reach the next valley. His knees wobbled a bit as he stumbled and slid down the steep slope into the bottom spruces. An impulse seized him to plunge on at once; to tackle those last two miles and get them over with. But he made himself dig a hole, as before, and build a fire and rest, knowing that he would make better time by stopping and would be surer of getting there at all.

When he climbed out of the valley into the storm and faced those last two miles, he wavered, stopped,

and for the first time lost hold on his bulldog self. It seemed utterly impossible for any human to butt into that blizzard and live. Until then he had believed he had a chance to get through. Now he felt, without admitting it to himself, that the two miles were beyond his power.

In a numb, dogged way he tried to think. If he went back to his fire, banked snow for shelter, and dragged up wood enough to last the night, he probably could wait out the blizzard safely. Then he thought about the Doukhobors. Two hundred lives, among them women and helpless children; two hundred people depending solely on him—

He bent his head low, groaned at his aching left leg, and started on toward Rivière Sans Sautes.

At the end of a mile he felt exhaustion creeping over him. Back to the wind, he crouched a minute in the snow to rest. Almost instantly he was half-covered with drift. He shook it off, got up, and shoved ahead. He had to rest again within a few hundred yards. The next time he made a hundred yards by sheer nerve. The next, only fifty.

It was harder and harder to shake off the drift and battle on. Without his realizing it, the intervals of rest grew longer, longer.

The time came when Zsbyski could not drive himself forward. Though he managed to get up, his left leg gave way under him, and he sank back. The steady, sibilant *seesh-seesh-seesh* of the driven snow lulled his senses. While the warm drift piled up at his back, he stared helplessly at the dancing, wraithlike whirls of

spume that whipped past him and went scudding out of sight down the gale.

Presently, between the dancing swirls, he made out a long blackish shadow twenty paces away, on his back trail. It was *not* a snow wraith. It was sitting still, its nose raised, its head tilted sideways.

Behind it Zsbyski thought he saw others. He rubbed the frost from his eyelashes and then he saw the shadowy things distinctly—nine of them. They were waiting patiently, as if they had waited thus before.

A jolt of anger surged through Corporal Zsbyski. The wolves jerked him back to his senses when nothing else could have. He got to his feet, shook his mittened fist at the gray forms and swore at them. The wolves backed up out of range and sat down again.

But not Zsbyski. He lowered his head once more and battled into the storm. Whenever he slowed down or his will started slipping, he turned and looked back through the spume at the ten big timber wolves. His numbed brain was aware of just two things—that wolf pack behind him and the valley shelter somewhere close ahead.

He reached the Sans Sautes slope so abruptly that he lost his footing and rolled down nearly to the bottom. The low-sweeping branches of a giant basswood stopped him. In spite of its ice coating, he recognized the tree; it was barely four hundred yards above the ford. He dusted himself off, and limped down the frozen, level stream. After his battle with the wind, the going was easy, and in ten minutes he was at the crossing.

To his utter amazement, there was not a sign of the Doukhobors or their camp.

In blank bewilderment he leaned against a sapling, rubbed the frost from his eyes, and peered around through the murky gloom. There was no mistake; this was the crossing— He himself had helped chop that swath through the lodgepole timber on both sides of the stream.

He shouted in Russian. Nobody answered. He saw nothing, heard nothing; and it finally came home to him that the Doukhobors had simply not camped at the Rivière Sans Sautes ford.

Baffled and furious, Zsbyski sat down on a broken sapling and opened his lips and spoke. He wore out five languages in ten minutes. He ripped Factor Hewes McAulay up the back for reporting that the Doukhobors were there at the crossing. He gave Nuttall a currycombing for asking a person to go get them. He keelhailed himself for risking his life and battling through eleven miles of blizzard, all for nothing. He gave the Doukhobors a lip-larruping for wandering around in a Saskatchewan woolly-whipper instead of staying in the Ukraine where they belonged.

Feeling considerably relieved, he gathered wood and coaxed a fire, took off his mittens under its protection, and set to work on his racquet. As he worked, he tried to think.

It would be dark within an hour. By morning the temperature would hit sixty-five below zero. Men, women, and children, the Doukhobors would freeze to death, wherever they were.

The thought tormented him. His racquet mended, he

got up and hunted around for signs that the Doukhobors had used the crossing just before the storm. But the snow had buried everything. The question throbbed in his brain: where in the *blank-blank-blank* were those Doukhobors? Factor Hewes McAulay had said they were at the Sans Sautes ford. By Little Mother Volga and the Great Horn Spoon this *was* that very ford. So McAulay had made a mistake.

But the immigrant band, Zsbyski reasoned, simply had to be somewhere north of Lac Outarde, and not far away. Coming north from the settlement, they probably had kept to the freight-hauler trail up the valley; the soaking rain had made the prairies almost impassable to their man-drawn carts. They hadn't gone on north up the main valley or the Johnny Bad-Man household would have seen them. The only branch trail led up Little Sans Sautes. Could they have taken that? There was an old buffalo wallow on Little Sans Sautes that sometimes was called a ford. Maybe that's where they were.

It was the only possibility Zsbyski could think of. In spite of his near-exhaustion, he decided to go and see.

As he put on his racquets he noticed that the wolves, which had been inching closer and closer in the slow twilight, were sitting in a semicircle not thirty feet away. He thought, "You're getting too familiar, you hungry cusses. Guess I'll give you a dressing down before I high-tail it for Little Sans Sautes crossing."

After kicking snow over his fire, he shuffled down the frozen stream a hundred yards and stopped suddenly behind a jutting rock. When the pack came loping around the jut, they met with a hot surprise, and

three of them sprawled in the snow at the burst from Zsbyski's belt-gun.

At a long, swinging shuffle he hurried down the valley, looking over his shoulder from time to time. He came to the forks, turned up Little Sans Sautes, and headed on for the old buffalo wallow.

A quarter mile away from it he halted sharply, listening to a queer, low sound. It sounded to him like people singing. Like a chorus of many, many people. In a lull between the savage blasts of the blizzard, he heard it distinctly—a hundred-voiced chant that rose and fell with the fury of the storm.

He leaned forward and fought his way toward the pathetic, low-toned chant of the wanderers.

3

Zsbyski's arrival at the Doukhobor camp was the most spectacular entrée he had ever made. During his years with the Mounted he had sneaked up on many a nest of "permit" runners and had broken up many a secret blood-dance, but this arrival seemed to him the beat of them all. It was a pure accident, and as much of a surprise to him as to the Doukhobors themselves, but nevertheless it was more impressive than trumpets and a fanfare.

To save time he had cut across an open highland where the river made an oxbow. As he neared the camp, the chanting stopped, and the veering wind fooled him. In the swirling darkness he hit the little valley above the camp, turned around, and started downstream. The wind at his back whooped him along, and the way he went down that valley reminded him

of how Constable Morrow had spread his coattails and flown home. A vicious, high-screaming gust of wind blanketed him in swirling snow and dropped him precipitately over a jump-off into the very center of the camp.

If he had been charioted out of the clouds, his arrival could hardly have been more startling.

The jump-off he had dropped over was the snow-buried Doukhobor carts, which had been thrown together in a square with one side open. In one corner of this miserable shelter the Doukhobors were kneeling together in a huddle, praying. They had no fires, for Little Sans Sautes had burned off that summer; and their clothes were pitifully inadequate for the Saskatchewan blizzard. There were eighty men, roughly clad, and eighty young peasant wives, their heads and arms wrapped in coarse gray shawls. The rest of the two hundred were children, most of them under three, many of them born enroute from the Old Country, as Zsbyski himself had been born.

In the center of the group their leader, a huge, wild-eyed fanatic, stood bareheaded with arms upraised, leading the chant, as his followers slowly froze.

In stupefied amazement the Doukhobors stared at Zsbyski as he fairly dropped out of the storm and appeared before them. The leader stopped waving his arms; the chanting broke off; even the crying of the children was for a moment hushed. Zsbyski himself realized what a strange figure indeed he must be in their eyes! He was snow-plastered; the whiskers on his rocky chin were frosted—he looked more like a storm-specter than a flesh-and-blood human.

A pock-scarred man sprang wildly to his feet and leveled an arm toward Zsbyski. "Did I not prophesy to ye, brothers—?"

The rest of his sentence was flung down the wind. Before he could repeat his words, the huge leader struck him with a clenched fist and knocked him sprawling.

Zsbyski had no idea what all this meant, but he wasted little time in wondering. His first glance told him that the women and children were in pitiful condition.

"Get up!" he bade the group in their own tongue. "Get up and follow me. I have come to lead you to shelter. You will die here. Get up. Quickly."

Expecting them to snatch at his offer, he was dumfounded when not a soul of the two hundred stirred. All of them turned their eyes upon their leader and silently awaited his answer.

"Who are ye?" he challenged Zsbyski hoarsely, in a Scriptural chant. "With what temptation, O unholy one, would ye tempt these people who are my children? It was by the Word that I brought them here, and here shall they stay until the Word comes to me to lead them hence."

The Doukhobors groaned, but not a voice was raised in opposition to the leader. Zsbyski smelled trouble. He could see that the leader's fiat of power over his followers was no idle boast. The man's domination was absolute; they would obey him in the face of death. These were a hard-minded people, of blind faith and a grim, terrible earnestness. As their leader bade them do, so would they do.

Then, with a jolt, Zsbyski remembered Nuttall's warning that he might have trouble with this fanatic leader, who believed that the spirit of St. John the Apostle had wrestled with his body and taken possession thereof.

"Holy brass bells!" he thought. "Getting here was a tough enough job but now look what a crick I'm up!"

He hid his anger and desperate impatience, and tried to conciliate the huge leader. "Nay," he said to the man, "you heard my words wrong, captain of souls. Surely you shall lead your followers. I am sent only as a guide, to bring you to shelter. But if you stay here, how many of you will the morning find alive? Would you have your children die here tonight?"

A chorus of groans burst from the lips of the men and women, as if in answer to the corporal's question. It was a mute, wordless prayer to their leader to deliver them from their suffering.

But Zsbyski's words and the groans were a challenge to the leader. He clenched his fists high over his head and shouted to his flock till their pleas died to a murmur and the murmur itself finally hushed.

"Into a new land have I led my people," he chanted, in a booming, exultant voice. "From their heavy labor and their bondage unto wicked kings have I led them; yea, from the land of iniquities to the land which the Great Father has promised me for my children. Shall ye then cast an eye backwards? Much less shall ye return one step! Here we shall stay, and when our tribulations cease, then shall our eyes behold the land that was promised unto us."

The pock-scarred man again leaped to his feet, level-

ing an accusing arm at the leader. "Ye are false!" he shouted, stamping his broken shoes. "It is not the Apostle John that possesses you, but a devil! Yea, a devil; a devil!" He whirled to the other Doukhobors. "Did I not tell ye, brothers? Did I not prophesy that one would come who would be possessed of a true prophet and would deliver us?"

Again the leader swung his fist at the pock-marked Doukhobor, but this time his rival evaded him.

Zsbyski had only a hazy notion what the strange clash between the two men meant. He did not much care. To him the only thing that mattered was that the women and children were freezing to death.

"But your people will die here tonight," he said quietly to the leader. "I am a guide sent to take you and your followers to shelter—"

"Ye are a fiend!" the huge fellow blared at him. "Begone! Go before the wrath of an apostle scorches ye!"

Zsbyski backed up a step from the man's fiery denunciation. He thought that surely his ears must be playing tricks with him. The leader's queer combination of power and madness—power over so many other people, and madness that would lead to their deaths—was something he had never seen before.

In desperation he spoke past him to the Doukhobors themselves. He pleaded, threatened, ordered. But all the results he got was a moaning for the shelter and warmth that he described. With a sinking heart he realized that they would stick with their leader. As long as the fanatic kept his spell over their minds and was an apostle in their eyes, just that long there would be no budging them.

The big fellow was advancing on him menacingly. "Ye fiend, ye cheat, ye devil—trying my followers' faith in me!" he thundered. "Begone, or I will rend you limb from limb!"

Zsbyski stopped backing up. His anger was kindling. Reason and soft words were not his long suit and they had failed, anyhow. To be called a cheat and a devil, not to mention some of the epithets that were untranslatable, was more than he had ever taken from anybody, and now he was vowing to take no more of them from this fanatic. But what really angered him was the idea of a self-appointed "apostle" keeping him from saving the two hundred people he had been sent to save. So he stopped flat-footed, took a deep breath, and opened up on his enemy.

He committed the man to seven bottomless pits and a dozen purgatories. He ran through the roll call of Eastern Devils. He swore that the apostle was a cloven-hoofed cheat, a horned liar, a fork-tailed impostor. "And by the beard of St. Boris," he wound up, smacking a fist into his mitten, "if you are the Apostle John, I am Gabriel himself and your better."

At the corporal's words the pock-marked man jumped wildly to his feet, shouting and thrashing his arms. The murmur among the Doukhobors swelled to a hoarse outcry.

Without knowing what or why, Zsbyski saw that his words had touched off something drastic. He saw, furthermore, that the issue between him and the leader was coming to a head, and coming fast. Bending down, he loosened his racquets so that he could step out of them quickly.

Roaring with rage at the stinging lash of Zsbyski's tongue, the apostle lunged forward. "Ye fiend, I shall break thy bones and dissolve thee!"

Ordinarily Zsbyski would have been the apostle's match in a stand-up fight, even though the apostle was much stronger, bigger, and longer-armed. But the five solid hours of battling a blizzard had nearly exhausted him. He wanted to get the fight over with in a hurry. Meeting the charge squarely, he stepped in between the huge arms outflung to grasp him and planted a short uppercut on the man's jaw. It snapped up the apostle's head, as he had figured, and he followed through with a terrific, long-swinging right on the tilted chin. It was not enough. It stopped the apostle's bull charge, but otherwise it scarcely fazed him.

Then and there Zsbyski realized that only shrewd, cool boxing could bring him through this battle. The thought jiggled through his mind that he was fighting not only for his own life against an infuriated, bearlike man, but for the lives of two hundred people. Sternly he got a grip on himself and took stock. He had fought brute fighters before. The strategy always was to wear them down; to keep away from them; keep jabbing and hammering them; keep tying 'em in knots—and always keep cool yourself. Cool as a cucumber, like Pedneault said.

He felt almost as though his loyal partner were standing ghostily just back of him and saying, "Cool, cool, Zy. Cool as a cucumber—or he'll murder you. Don't let him grapple; you're too fagged for that. Easy does it, Zy; easy and cool."

Deliberately he began to whittle his enemy down. As he backed off, he dug in a short-rib punch that made the apostle gasp. The latter charged again. Still Zsbyski backed off, saving his strength while he landed shrewd, weakening punches, and boxing off the long-swinging, murderous blows aimed for him. Coolly he kept playing for the stomach and short ribs. For the first time in his fighting days he landed when and where he pleased.

In a few minutes of hot work he had the apostle breathing like an engine piston. The lunges were weakening; the murderous blows were fewer and not so murderous.

At the right moment Zsbyski failed to back up from a lunge. He stepped in between the arms again and planted the preliminary left uppercut. Then his long, bone-smashing right landed on the tilted jaw. The apostle sagged limply and fell forward against him. Zsbyski let him tumble into the snow.

"I don't know how I'd fight if I got bull-mad," he panted, as he drew the mittens on over his raw knuckles, "but old Ped was dead right about me keeping cool as a cucumber!"

He turned to the Doukhobors and raised a hand to still them. A howling blast kicked over, leaving a few seconds of taut quiet in its wake. But before he could speak, the pock-scarred man was on his feet again, gesticulating and shouting himself hoarse. In the silence, with no huge fist to knock him down, his words to the immigrant band rang clear and startling.

"Have I not told ye that the leader ye followed was a false leader? Did I not tell ye that he was leading ye

into destruction? Did I not prophesy that a major saint would appear among us and deliver us? Lo! he is come! He hath confounded the impostor and lo! he hath stilled the storm. From his own lips ye have heard his name. Let us arise and take up our goods and do as he biddeth!"

Zsbyski's mouth dropped open with astonishment. The words about his being a major saint and a deliverer from on high struck him like a cartload of bricks, and he leaned feebly against a wagon wheel. By the strangeness of his arrival, by his scoffing jest about being St. Gabriel, by his hard-won victory over the apostle, by everything he had said and done, he had played right into the stark-mad prophecy! He had led himself to the slaughter! Now he understood the strange play between the two men. And why the Doukhobors, at his arrival, had stared at him as if he were either a devil or an angel.

"St. Gabriel—*me!*" he gasped. He sat down weakly on a wagon tongue, while the pock-scarred man danced about triumphantly at the fulfillment of his prophecy. "Me—St. Gabriell!" He thought about his six rough-tough comrades at the barracks. "If they ever hear about this, ever hear that I was supposed to be St. Gabriel—oh, oh, oh!"

Presently he straightened up and looked around at his flock. Whether they really believed he was a major saint he could not tell, but now that he had confounded their false apostle they plainly did believe that he had been divinely sent to deliver them from their suffering and guide them to safe haven.

As he looked at them and felt all their eyes on him, a queer feeling of awe crept over him—awe at his heavy responsibility and their simple, genuine religious faith. However blind their faith might be, it was genuine.

Quietly and quickly he gave his orders to the band of wanderers. They formed in fours, with strong men in front to break a path and other men at the rear to help the weaker ones along. The carts and all equipment were abandoned; there would be time to recover them when the blizzard stopped. In less than five minutes he had the band out of the camp and was leading them down the valley of Little Sans Sautes.

The men breaking the path in front had to be relieved by others every few minutes. The women trudged along silently, bearing their sufferings without a moan. Both men and women were exhausted, numb with cold, weak with hunger, and almost ready to give up the struggle; and Zsbyski could keep them moving only by desperate exertions. He himself was stumbling with fatigue, but his responsibility for those two hundred souls gave him strength, and their faith in him as their shepherd buoyed him up.

But the procession made such slow time in the cold and windy blackness that at the Big Sans Sautes forks, where he allowed them to halt for a brief rest, he debated whether to stop and camp there, out of the storm, and try to build fires. He doubted if he could ever get his band the few miles on to Lac Outarde Settlement. But he decided that he had to go on with them willy-nilly. When the storm laid and the still cold tightened down, open fires would not be enough. With-

out blankets or any good heavy clothing, the women and children would never live through it. They had to have shelter and food quickly.

While his band rested, he groped around in a stance of pine, found a dead tree, and with his hand-ax chopped a dozen splits out of it for torches. After lighting the splits and passing them back along the procession, he gave the word to march.

The spell of their strange religious faith moved Zsbyiski profoundly. In all his life he had experienced nothing like it. Nor had he ever even imagined a situation as outlandish and bizarre as the one he was actually in. "St. Gabriel—*me!*" he would mutter, and then he would look around and rub his eyes to make sure that the glimmering torches were real. It seemed to him a fantastic piece of irony that he, the most notorious, hard-swearing sinner of the whole Division, should be marching at the head of a Doukhobor band as their leader and shepherd—accepted by them as a heaven-sent guide in their hour of need.

As he coaxed and drove them on and on down the Sans Sautes valley, he hated more and more to trudge back along that line of stumbling, pitiful humans. They were suffering so dreadfully. All along the column they kept imploring him to intercede for them with the Great Father and say that their anguish was more than they could bear. And solemnly, to encourage them, Zsbyiski promised. And where the suffering was particularly desperate and courage flickering out, he would close his bloodshot eyes and pray aloud for them, and say that the Great Father would soon bring their journey to an end.

4

Zsbyski brought his little band into Lac Outarde an hour after midnight. How to get them all into shelter quickly was the next problem.

In front of Agent Duncan's residence, a spacious two-story frame house, he halted the procession and knocked at the door. He had to knock several times before Duncan appeared. Zsbyski explained the situation briefly and asked the Agent to take twenty of them.

"*Twenty?*" Duncan echoed, his teeth chattering. "My good man, how in the world can I accommodate twenty people? It's impossible! I can take two; no, I shall take three. But twenty—"

"You don't understand," Zsbyski interrupted. "I've got two hundred people out here, freezing, and there's only a dozen houses to put them in. Your house is the biggest of all—"

"But I tell you I can't take in twenty people and feed them and keep them warm. I've told you that twenty is impossible."

"It's not a question of comfort," Zsbyski pleaded. "It's a question of their getting under a roof or freezing to death. Will you take fifteen, then?"

"My good man, I told you I would take three. That is what I meant. Do I have to stand here and freeze repeating that?"

Zsbyski stared at the Agent, and a rage took hold of him. His big hands slowly clenched and unclenched. When he spoke, his voice was husky with fury.

"Get back to bed, you! I won't leave any of them

here! I'd rather they'd freeze to death than stay under the roof of a mealy-mouthed hypocrite like you!"

Agent Duncan stiffened with shock and outrage. "Sirruh!" he spluttered. "Sir-ruh! You will rue—"

"For half a cent," Zsbyski blazed, "I'd rue you a good 'un on the jaw. Now get back to bed before I get mad and break every bone in your body!"

He turned to his band and led them on to the three houses of the Hudson Bay establishment. At his thundering kick, McAulay thrust his head out of an upstairs window. Again Zsbyski started to explain, but he barely got the first words from his mouth.

"Great snakes!" the factor spluttered, catching sight of the long blur of figures behind the corporal. "Wait till I jerk my pants on, Zy. Shoot about thirty into here and forty into my trading store and a couple dozen into the warehouse. While you're getting the others quartered, I'll whoop up fires and thaw these out and get something hot inside 'em!"

As the window came down with a bang, Zsbyski caught fragments of Hewes McAulay's excited words to his missus: "Sarah, wake up! Heaven's sake—Corporal Zsbyski's out there, with them Doukhobors. Sixty below zero—women and kids. . . . Woman, hurry up!"

At one o'clock the next afternoon, through a still, bright cold of sixty-odd degrees below zero, three men loped out of the southeast prairie and racqueted into the open quadrangle of the Police post. They were Sergeant Pedneault, Constable Coffey, and Corporal Gabriel Zsbyski.

Pedneault and Coffey headed for the barracks, but

Zsbyski crossed to Nuttall's cabin, knocked, and entered.

"Everything's lined up pretty well with the Doukhobors, sir," he reported to the inspector. "We scattered 'em around to the cabins, like I phoned; but McAulay has still got sixty on his hands. McAulay isn't a rich man, and I don't see how he's going to charge the expense against the Bay—"

"We have a government fund at our disposal for such purposes," Nuttall interrupted. "McAulay will be reimbursed. About these Doukhobors—are you sure they won't pick up and wander off again before we get a location for them?"

"I'm tolerable certain, sir. I talked around with 'em this morning, and I think they're about burned out on apostles and saints. They realize that it was this apostle and his ravings that caused all their troubles. He isn't exactly a real Doukhobor, but belongs to a special sect. But I'm positive he's done for with those people; his press-teege is flatter'n a pancake with them. And this pock-marked fellow, Ilyon—he's one of that special sect, too, with his own line of prophecies and ravings."

"So I heard," Nuttall remarked, suppressing a smile. "In fact, I understand that St. Gabriel is loose here in Saskatchewan."

Zsbyski turned brick red and clenched a fist. "If I catch who's peddling it around about last night," he growled, "I'll hit him so hard he'll wake up with a halo on."

Inspector Nuttall turned to the stove and stuck in some wood, meanwhile straightening up his face. When he came back to his desk, he was serious and worried.

"Zsbyski," he said, "next spring and summer there'll be several thousand of these Doukhobors coming to the western Provinces to settle. Headquarters is looking around for a man who can take charge of the bands as they arrive, and guide them to their locations. But men who speak their language, know this country, and have gumption enough to handle their odd sort are scarce. The job carries a sergeancy. I would like to recommend you for it, and push you, Zsbyski; but—"

"But what, sir?"

"Well, bluntly, headquarters won't go along with me, as things stand. They've had a series of complaints against you and they seem to be under the impression you're a pretty bad egg."

Zsbyski's face grew long. "You don't have to tell me who made those complaints," he said. "I guess that the sergeancy is really cooked now, after the hog-scalding I gave him last night." He turned to the door. "I do thank you, sir, for wanting to recommend me, but just forget it. Some ways, I guess, Agent Duncan is right enough. I've been a pretty rough-tough specimen and a bad example."

Nuttall watched him leave. "Lord, a bad example!" he thought, trying to picture that heroic and incredible trek of last night.

Half an hour later a belled dog team pulled up at the inspector's cabin. Agent George M. Duncan emerged from the blankets and buffalo robes and hurried inside, his thin face hard, his eyes vengeful.

Barely nodding to Nuttall's "How d'you do, Duncan," he demanded abruptly, "Inspector, you've got to suspend this Corporal Zsbyski from duty and see to it that

he's discharged from the Mounted Police. Immediately, sir. I'll brook no delay."

Nuttall whistled under his breath. "Would you mind letting me know the basis of your demand?" he asked drily.

"He's a profane, blasphemous scoundrell" Duncan rapped. "His influence in this region nullifies all my labors with the Indians. I've borne with him patiently till now, but when he comes to my house at midnight during a blizzard and insults me, vilifies me, threatens me—"

Nuttall jerked a little. "What's this? Last night? He mentioned something—but just what did happen between you two last night?"

"Why, when he brought that band of fanatics to the settlement, he banged on my door and ordered me to take in twenty of them. When I refused, he became abusive and threatened me with physical violence. His exact words—I have them written down—were, 'Break every bone in your body.'"

Nuttall winced and his face paled. He believed Duncan; the quotation was definitely Zsbyski-esque. His heart sank as he realized how such a threat against the Agent would sound to the Division superintendent, on top of the other charges. Zsbyski wouldn't get those three stripes. He wouldn't even keep his two stripes. He would probably be put off the Force summarily.

"I'm terribly sorry to hear this, Mr. Duncan," he said. "I apologize personally for the incident. I'm sure the corporal didn't really mean— You see, he was exhausted from twelve hours of fighting a terrific blizzard, and he had on his hands two hundred people

who needed shelter without a minute's delay. And maybe he didn't believe that twenty was a preposterous number, considering that the half-breeds, with their little two-room shacks, took in eight or ten apiece—"

"You are upholding him, sirruh!" Duncan rasped. "Very well! I will see to it myself. Very well indeed, sirruh. I do not need your cooperation. I have other recourses."

He started for the door. But Nuttall stepped in front of him. "Just a minute, my Christian friend," the inspector snapped. His cheekbones were red and his eyes flashed fire. All his long, patient program to keep down trouble dropped away. "If you've just got to have war, you can have it—and I'll see that you get plenty.

"During your year here, my overworked men and I have gone out of our way to help you on a hundred different occasions. Instead of being grateful, you write secret letters complaining about my post. And because of a personal grudge, you've been gunning for one of my best men. All right! From now on, Agent Duncan, you'll conduct your affairs without help from us. How you'll get along with these Crees when we quit propping you up—that's going to be worth watching!

"Second point. I hear that Forrest Ewing, your predecessor, is well enough to return to Lac Outarde, if the Agency were vacant. All of us want him back. He established schools and taught. He persuaded the *métis* to quit their miserable freighting and take up land to farm. He went the rounds with my patrols, week in and week out—he, an old man, mind you. And now, what's *your* record? You've let his school work go to smash.

You've let the *métis* slip back into their old ways. You won't learn Cree, so you have to deal through an interpreter.

"Just one more thing. I'm going to write up all these charges against you. I'm going to send copies to the Police heads, your Department chief, and the Eastern papers. You're always hinting around about secret influences and pulling wires. All right! It's a dirty business, but I've got secret influences too, and I can pull wires. Now, suppose you jingle on back home."

Duncan stood with his hand on the doorknob. Behind the man's livid anger, Inspector Nuttall saw that he was shaken and afraid, and the officer breathed a silent prayer of thankfulness. He had played boldly, had spoken with a great deal more assurance than he felt, but now he saw that he was on solid ground.

As a parting fillip, he told Duncan, "If you want to withdraw those sneak reports against Corporal Zsbyski and if you decide that this raw West is no place for you, Mr. Duncan, it might be that I wouldn't write up these charges. You don't have to answer right now, but think it over—and don't wait too long."

A few minutes later Sergeant Pedneault knocked at the door and entered. His left eye was puffed up suspiciously and his nose leaned a little to larboard. Inspector Nuttall looked at him questioningly.

"What's the matter, Sergeant? What happened to you?"

"I was just boxing, Zsbyski and me. Practicing for that tournament. It's about Zsbyski that I wanted to talk to you, sir. Something queer has got into him."

"Good heavens, what's the trouble with that big hunk now? What else has he got into?"

"It's the way he acts, sir," Pedneault said. "He's been so queer and quiet. For one thing, he hasn't let out a single jawbreaker all day. He's not sick, and I can't figure what's come over him."

"I'll try to find out," Nuttall promised. "Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. It's about this matter of who goes to Regina for the boxing tournament. I believe Zy is the better man, and we ought to send him instead of me."

"That's unselfish of you, Pedneault. But I can't agree. I've seen you two boxing, and you're the better man by a good margin."

"That's what I used to think," Pedneault said ruefully. "Always before, I slammed Zy around the ring any old way. He's got stuff, but he wouldn't stay cool, nor would he get fighting mad. So in our practice today, sir, seeing that he was not very lively during the first two rounds, I thought I'd jolly him up a bit. So I said to him, 'Put up your mitts, St. Gabriel; I want to knock the halo off you.'"

Inspector Nuttall forgot to smoke. "Heavens! Then what?"

Pedneault rubbed at his swollen jaw. "Why, sir, considering all that happened to me right after that—well, that's how I know that Zy is the better man!"

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